

# SOME PROBLEMS OF THE STRATEGY AND TACTICS OF THE INDIAN NATIONAL LIBERATION AND COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

●. V. MARTYSHIN

The Comintern's history is bound up in a thousand and one ways with modern times. It was brought into being to meet strategic objectives, some of which still confront the progressive political forces of many nations. Any interpretation of the Comintern's line has to be made with an eye on present-day realities, whether one likes it or not. Even various students of the Comintern's policies in Asia, notably in India, have found it right and proper to acknowledge this. "Our aim has been to make a contribution towards the understanding of recent developments by placing them in an historical perspective," Hélène Carrère d'Encausse and Stuart R. Schram write in their preface to an English edition of their book *Marxism and Asia*.<sup>1</sup> The American student of M. N. Roy's activities, John Patrick Haithcox, remarks that the current controversy about a "proper attitude to 'bourgeois nationalistic' regimes in the 'third world' is a modern manifestation of that delicate problem which has agitated the minds of Communists ever since the Comintern was established".<sup>2</sup>

Naturally, the problems now being resolved by revolutionary forces in the countries of Asia and Africa and the conditions they have to operate in are not identical to the aims and conditions of the struggle in the colonial and

<sup>1</sup> Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, Stuart R. Schram, *Marxism and Asia*, The Penguin Press, London, 1969, p. VII.

<sup>2</sup> John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 215.

dependent countries in the Comintern's days. Yet there is an obvious line of continuity between these objectives.

The historic importance of Comintern policy in respect of the national liberation and communist movement in India and the activities of the Indian Communists, starting from the formation of the early communist groups, indisputably goes beyond the bounds of one country, considering the closing stage of the downfall of the colonial system of imperialism.

In India, distinguished as it is by an outstanding diversity of social and economic conditions and the political trends they brought into being, the international and Indian communist movement had to resolve a multitude of basic problems, like those now besetting the developing countries, for the first time. It was necessary to be able to reckon with the moods of the Indian national bourgeoisie which led the country's liberation movement, involving as it did petty-bourgeois urban elements and about to involve millions of peasants who were coming out to press for their own needs. It was necessary to understand the historical background to the positions of these classes, share their common aims and means of the struggle against imperialism along with retaining its own class and political independence and its allegiance to the objectives of the communist movement.

The political scene was dominated by bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces which were historically placed in a more advantageous position than the Communists and which spread their influence to the working class. It is the Indian National Congress (INC)—an experienced political organisation, grouping patriots of different convictions and social origins—that was the unchallenged leader of the anti-imperialist movement. It was invariably under control of the national bourgeoisie but in its anti-imperialist action it relied on support from the working masses. The Congress produced some leaders who, enjoying the love and confidence of the largest sections of the population, were sometimes capable of looking beyond the interests of the Indian bourgeoisie and understanding its class limitations—Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

The INC, while grouping representatives of different classes, was at the same time a scene of hard struggle be-

tween the right and left forces. One particular feature the Indian anti-imperialist movement had along with the hegemony of the national bourgeoisie was an abundance and diversity of petty-bourgeois ideological and political trends. These were distinguished by waverings, abrupt change of mood, switch-over from radicalism to reformism, from revolutionary enthusiasm to the illusions of enlightenment, from an awareness of the class interests of the working people to nationalism. There was a time when petty-bourgeois trends took scientific socialism and Marxism-Leninism as their banner. To work out a proper attitude to the Indian National Congress and the petty-bourgeois trends in the national movement was an extremely complex task before the Communist International and the Communists of India. A critical study of their experience gives certain bearings to go by in deciding what is still an extremely relevant question of the relations between the Communist, petty-bourgeois and national bourgeois parties and movements in the developing countries.

The communist movement in India has a hard, yet glorious, history behind it. Its major upshot is the existence of an authoritative and representative Communist party—the vanguard of the Indian working class and a consistent exponent of the interests of the working people and democratic forces. The great part the Communist Party of India is playing in the nation's political life today, its intransigent struggle against home and foreign reaction and its staunchness in defending the everyday needs of the workers and peasants have been generally recognised. The intense search for the right way to follow has involved some errors and miscalculations which the CPI has admitted quite openly, as have representatives of the international communist movement. Those have been the errors of committed revolutionaries and patriots who failed to take proper decisions because of the most tangled internal and external situation and sometimes because of inadequate theoretical grounding and practical experience. The sober approach of the Marxists of India and other countries to the CPI's history and the Comintern's oriental policies can be set off against the biased and methodologically groundless interpretations of bourgeois writers always striving to exploit both the objective and the subjective difficulties in order to

discredit what is one of the oldest contingents of the communist movement in Asia.

*LENIN'S AND ROY'S PLATFORMS ON THE NATIONAL AND COLONIAL QUESTION AND METHODS APPLIED BY THEIR BOURGEOIS CRITICS*

The dispute on the strategy and tactics to apply to the national and colonial question, which M. N. Roy who represented the Indian Communists had with Lenin at the Second Congress of the Comintern, is widely known. M. N. Roy was the first to come forward with a sectarian and dogmatic ultra-revolutionary programme which, variously modified, reappeared subsequently in many countries and in many parts of the world over and over again. The debate with Lenin earned Roy even some sympathy of avowed opponents of the communist movement. At a later stage, the evolution of Comintern policy and Roy's position did not remove the differences of principle between them. When the Comintern followed Lenin's advice on the colonial question, Roy, without in any way advertising his divergence from the majority opinion and, perhaps, even sincerely accepting at least some of Lenin's criticism, nevertheless stuck to his own ideas and sought to impress them on the Indian Communists. At the time of the Sixth Congress, that sectarian line with regard to the national and colonial question seriously affected, if for a time, the appropriate positions of the Comintern. Roy was disappointed in his earlier convictions, revised them and was coming round to the idea of indispensable unity in the struggle for national independence. After having broken with the Comintern and the CPI, Roy attempted at one time to pursue a line of his own as a leader of an independent left-radical movement. But his supporters failed to become a major political force in India. Despairing of politics, Roy passed to preaching a system of "new or radical humanism" which he had himself constructed and took to what was, in point of fact, liberal enlightenment activities. He lost his faith in the communist ideal, moreover, in the communist and all revolutionary movement, and became a liberal critic of communism in India and the world, although that

criticism never became the main pursuit of his life which ended in 1954.

The conflicting nature of Roy's activities, his closeness to the communist movement and his differences with it ending up in his total departure from it, have made Roy a favourite of bourgeois specialists on the communist movement in India. His views have invariably been a centre of attraction in considering the CPI's and the Comintern's line, especially in their opening stages, and are now being widely used in search of evidence to vindicate a number of biased propositions. However, even without any regard to how bourgeois writers have been using Roy's views and activities, these are of certain interest by themselves just as well. That is why it is right and proper to examine some points of principle in the CPI's and the Comintern's policies in association with their bourgeois interpretations parallel with a brief survey of the ideological and political evolution of that distinguished, if extremely controversial, leader of the Indian communist and national liberation movement.

M. N. Roy was born into a Brahman's family in Bengal between 1886 and 1893. From his youthful years he was a militant nationalist, burning with noble intolerance of foreign oppression and vague aspirations for social justice. Roy had no systematic training, but he was a man of keen intelligence anxious for self-perfection and active in search of ways to resolve the problems that agitated his mind. He did his best to make up by his revolutionary mettle for a shortage of theoretical grounding. By nature, Roy was a rebel, a revolutionary of pre-Marxian times, and he wanted to remain as such until his dying day. "When, as a school-boy of fourteen, I began my political life, which may end in nothing, I wanted to be free," M. N. Roy wrote. "The old-fashioned revolutionaries thought in terms of freedom. In those days, we had not read Marx. We did not know about the existence of the proletariat. Still, many spent their lives in jail and went to the gallows. There was no proletariat to propel them. They were not conscious of class struggle. They did not have the dream of Communism. But they had a human urge to revolt against the intolerable conditions of life. They did not know exactly how those conditions could be changed. But they tried to change them, anyhow. I began my political life with that spirit, and

I still draw my inspiration rather from that spirit than from the three volumes of *Capital* or three hundred volumes by the Marxists.”<sup>1</sup>

Following the traditions of Bengal, where the political struggle often took on extreme forms while non-violent methods did not strike root very much even during Gandhi's lifetime, Roy joined the terrorist liberation organisations, more particularly the underground Yugantar group. When one of the actions of those patriots in bringing a supply of arms to Calcutta was uncovered, Roy, to escape the persecution by the British authorities, fled to Japan in August 1915 and moved on from there to San Francisco, the home of a strong American section of one of the biggest underground associations of Indian national revolutionaries—the Ghadar Party. It was in America that Roy began to learn socialist and Marxist ideas. But there, too, he was persecuted, that time for illegal entry into the US, and had to move on to Mexico where he took part in the creation of a Communist party.

That was the record of revolutionary activities that Roy had by the time he came to Moscow for the Second Congress of the Comintern.

Roy was very active on the Congress Commission on the National and Colonial Questions, where he produced his “Supplementary Theses” basically different from the platform elaborated by Lenin. Lenin held that the Communists of colonial countries had to work in two directions at once. On the one hand, they had to work for the achievement of the class—economic and political—interests of the proletariat, train committed Marxists organisationally and politically, and rally the working people behind them; on the other, they had to do their best to promote the national democratic movement, to be able to back up all the forces which put forward progressive demands (including the national bourgeoisie insofar as it acted from anti-imperialist positions), and strive to build up the revolutionary-democratic potential of the nationalist movement and raise the role of the working masses, above all the working

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from: *M. N. Roy—Philosopher-Revolutionary*. A Symposium Compiled and Edited by Sibnarayan Ray, Renaissance Publishers (Private), Ltd., Calcutta, 1959, p. 7.

class, in it. Lenin saw the anti-colonial movement led by the bourgeoisie as a sphere of activity for the Communists where the communist movement was to gain strength which would enable it eventually to claim leadership on a national scale. Naturally, the involvement in the bourgeois-democratic movement implied not only supporting anti-imperialism and its national bourgeois leadership, but also consistent criticism of its waverings and predilection for compromise. That was how Lenin and the Comintern, which had accepted to follow that political line, visualised the initial stage of the struggle of the Communists of colonial countries for national and social liberation.

Roy had a different view of the Communists' strategic and tactical objectives. While overplaying the degree of maturity of the revolutionary forces in the colonial countries, he believed that the communist vanguard must place itself in control of the movement right from the outset. Roy dismissed the definite community of objectives between the bourgeois-democratic and communist movements during the anti-colonial stage and, consequently, the need for them to form an alliance. He underestimated the influence of nationalist parties on the working masses and did not take into account the fact that during that stage most of the workers and peasants saw the bourgeois leaders and organisations as representatives of a nation, rather than the exponents of the interests of the bourgeoisie, and were, therefore, prepared to follow them in the battle for national independence.

Roy opposed Lenin's idea that the Communists should support the bourgeois-democratic liberation movements. In his opinion, the Comintern had to contribute towards the development of Communist parties alone, while the latter had to address themselves wholly and entirely to the struggle for the class interests of the working people. Roy set his face against the contacts of the Comintern and European Communist parties with the nationalist movements in the colonies and called for moral and material aid to be given to the revolutionary forces of the colonies through none other than their Communist parties.

Lenin placed emphasis on the struggle against imperialism and on the battle for independence, while Roy gave priority to the struggle to achieve leadership of the movement.

Lenin, considering the actual situation, oriented Communists to a hard and, most likely, long struggle within the national anti-imperialist movement to win recognition as the leading force, strengthen their positions step by step, and extend the influence of Communist parties through a sustained, yet patient, effort. Roy thought that it was by leading the movement right from the start that one could make it succeed.

Roy combined his uncritical belief in the revolutionary potentialities of the communist movement in the colonies, which was but in its infancy at the time, with a nihilistic attitude to the working class of advanced capitalist countries. Roy held that the revolutionary centres had shifted from developed capitalist countries into the colonies.

The platform Roy brought before the Second Congress of the Comintern only to see it rejected was typically leftist. Its basic principles had more than once been proclaimed in the democratic, working-class and national liberation movements of many countries of the world. There was nothing specifically "oriental" about that programme beyond, perhaps, Roy's Asiocentric tendencies which showed themselves in his ambition to consider the colonial East as the main centre of the world revolutionary movement. However, since that platform had been put forward by a representative of the East, of Asia, and since at the Second Congress of the Comintern he had taken issue with Lenin, the leader of the international communist movement, Roy's position has been extensively exploited by bourgeois historians in their attempts to prove that Comintern policy was no good for the revolutionary movements in the colonial and dependent countries and that it was logical and inevitable for a special kind of "Eastern" or "Asian" Marxism to emerge as a counterweight to the "Western" or "Russian" Marxism.

That way of putting the question was relatively new for bourgeois literature. It was typical of the postwar period or, to be exact, for the 1960s and 1970s. In earlier times anti-communist propaganda did not seek to underline the distinction between the communist movements in the East and the West. It centred on its argument about the Russian influence. The emergence of communist groups and parties in Asian countries was seen as a product of the Comintern's

scheming. "No other organisation has ever given as much occasion for so much romantic wishful thinking," admitted Dominique Desanti, after she left the French Communist Party (so she can hardly be suspected of particular sympathies for the international communist movement). "The Comintern was for journalists of the period between the two wars what the secret services are for detective stories. The hand and eye of Moscow were discovered—and more often imagined—in any social movement."<sup>1</sup> It would, naturally, be contrary to such an approach to identify the specific national and historical features of the communist movement, notably in India, which could then be considered as a sign of that movement's independence and of its being due to the local situation. In actual fact, all consideration of the specific background to the evolution of the Communist parties in the East and to the independent formulation of their political line was replaced by an argument about the manifest dependence on Moscow and the total divorce of Asian Communists from the particular social and historical conditions, national cultures and traditions. These views of bourgeois journalists and historians on the communist movement are designed to provide an ideological justification for the repressive policies of imperialism. The Prosecutor in the Meerut case against the CPI alleged the Indian Communists to be "anti-country", "anti-God" and "anti-family", that is, to be spiritually alien to India.<sup>2</sup>

Thirty years after the Meerut case V. B. Karnik, one of the associates of Roy after his desertion of the Comintern, writing a belligerently anti-communist preface to an assorted set of CPI documents, published with an obvious intention to undermine the party's influence, also claimed that the communist movement had not arisen in India in a natural way, but had been nurtured abroad and transplanted into Indian soil.<sup>3</sup>

The head-on attack on the communist movement in the East, the attempt to refute it altogether and isolate it as an extraneous body have all failed. The rise of the pres-

<sup>1</sup> Dominique Desanti, *L'Internationale Communiste*, Payot, Paris, 1970, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *The Labour Monthly*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1930, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> See: *Indian Communist Party Documents 1930-1956*, pp. VI-VII.

tige of the Communists in Asian countries, India among them, has provided the indisputable evidence to prove that they draw their strength from the support of the mass of the people, and that in their action they strive to do all they can towards resolving the most acute social problems. The petty-bourgeois and nationalistic tendencies of a number of unstable supporters of Marxism-Leninism became more noticeable and more active against the background of an enlarged front of communist activity. They find fertile ground in the specific social conditions of the East, with an abundance of ethnic, caste, religious and clannish contradictions often shaping the actual form of social conflicts.

At the present time, the opponents of Communists are banking on their division, on a decline of their solidarity with the countries of the socialist community and with the Communists of advanced capitalist countries, as well as on the opposition of "Asian" and "European" Marxism and on stoking up contradictions between them. They see such a policy as the most effective means today to weaken the international communist and working-class movement and the revolutionary forces in the developing countries. That was why the argument about the purely national sources of origin of the communist movement in Eastern countries, which used to be dismissed in earlier days, has now come in handy.

"Asian communism has derived its preferred style of revolution partly from select but crucial aspects of traditional Asian political culture interacting harmoniously with certain politico-ideological tendencies characteristic of communism,"<sup>1</sup> Professor Robert A. Scalapino writes. This prominent American politologist admits that "the first Asian communist leaders in the period immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution were Westernised, reasonably well-educated, urbanised intellectuals".<sup>2</sup> Not all bourgeois writers of the 1960s and 1970s share this judgement as far as M. N. Roy is concerned.

Carrère d'Encausse and Schram write about the "dramatic conflict between European and Asian communism". The very approach to this question betrays a definite standpoint

<sup>1</sup> *Problems of Communism*, Special Issue, January-April 1971, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

held by bourgeois students of the communist movement in Asia. They attribute all differences in the understanding of Marxist theory and tactics of Communists, derived from class and political principles, to specific national conditions only. Everything that contradicts the concerted line of the international communist movement is declared to be a logical consequence of the divergence of national interests and traditions, an indispensable readjustment of the theory of scientific socialism to particular conditions, and a natural protest of "Asian Communists" against the attempts of "European Marxists" who are claimed to be guided by their particular interests and to think themselves supreme authorities in the interpretation of Marxist theory.

"Marxism is an intrinsically European current of thought, which unites several of the most characteristic traits of European civilisation as a whole: the sense of history inherent in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the Promethean urge to transform nature that has manifested itself since the Renaissance, and especially since the industrial revolution," H. Carrère d'Encausse and S. R. Schram write, and go on to say: "Marxism ... may be regarded as an attempt to Europeanise the world."<sup>1</sup>

These are the methods many bourgeois writers apply in considering the polemic between Lenin and Roy. Genuine coverage of the discussion on the national and colonial questions at the Second Congress of the Comintern is rare occurrence in bourgeois literature. One exception is the book by John Patrick Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India*, in which he admits that in 1920 Roy, with the impatience of youth, "underestimated the task of mobilising social discontent and creating an effective organisational weapon".<sup>2</sup> It is common, however, for bourgeois authors to oppose what they claim to be Lenin's subjective and unjustifiably "Russian" or "European" approach to the positions of Roy who is alleged to have relied on the knowledge of facts and traditions and to have been typical of Asian Communists in general.

H. Carrère D'Encausse and S. R. Schram, while acknowl-

<sup>1</sup> Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, Stuart R. Schram, *Op. cit.*, pp. 4, 28.

<sup>2</sup> John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

edging Lenin's sympathetic attitude to the national liberation movements of the non-European peoples, claim, nevertheless, that "he had not achieved, even at the end of his life, any comprehension of the explicitly cultural dimension of the Asian revolution".<sup>1</sup> In other words, they assert that the founder of the Comintern was ill-informed of the specific social and historical conditions of Asian countries. That unfounded contention came under criticism even from the reviewer of the book *Marxism and Asia* in the American journal *Problems of Communism*, A. Doak Barnett: "Lenin clearly saw the important role that non-European bourgeois-democratic nationalist movements could play in the overall effort to weaken imperialism, and he increasingly recognised the similar potential of the peasantry. Yet the authors argue that Lenin, too, was basically 'Eurocentric' in his cultural outlook."<sup>2</sup>

Committed to their starting argument that Marxism is an attempt at Europeanising the world, some bourgeois researchers have been producing totally unjustified ideas to claim that Lenin's strategy with regard to the national and colonial question was a replica of the Bolshevik strategy in the Russian revolution. "Lenin's ideas on strategy and tactics reflected the peculiarities of the Russian scene, and particularly his contempt for the political capacities of the capitalist class there," Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller write. "Yet these concepts were incorporated into a general body of theory intended for universal application. Lenin's later proposals for strategy and tactics in the underdeveloped and colonial areas of the world, such as India, were in large part merely an extension of his established system of ideas."<sup>3</sup>

Arguments of this kind make one thing clear—those who produced them have an artless knack of distorting the real state of things. Lenin's platform on the national and colonial question was basically different from the Bolshevik strategy in the Russian revolution, above all, as regards the attitude to the bourgeoisie. Lenin, who did not recognise the Russian bourgeoisie as a revolutionary force, called on

<sup>1</sup> Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, Stuart R. Schram, *Op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.

<sup>2</sup> *Problems of Communism*, Special Issue, January-April 1971, p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

the working class to lead the revolutionary movement in this country. But the line he suggested for the national liberation movement in the colonial countries was different. In that case he proceeded from a comprehension of the serious anti-imperialist potential of the national bourgeoisie and from the need to cooperate with it and back it up in its struggle for independence, criticising its class limitations, and to recognise its leading role in the general national movement in so far as the consistently democratic and revolutionary forces are too weak to lead that movement.

This platform arose from a clear understanding of the dissimilarity of the historical conditions of Russia and India and the immediate objectives of the revolutionary movement and, consequently, the alignment of the class forces in these countries as well as from a careful study of the colonial world. And yet it has been invoked to accuse Lenin and the Comintern of voluntarism. The clash of their conclusions with actual reality does not embarrass the bourgeois pragmatists. As long as the line of opposing "Asian Marxism" to "Russian Marxism" appears to be politically profitable, it should be pursued without fear of conflict with facts and, as we shall yet see, even with their own constructs.

Lenin has been reproached with having abandoned the Marxist vision of the "broader outlines of history" and having devised his strategy and tactics guiding himself exclusively by an "empirical flexibility" of a "practical man", concerned with nothing beyond vindicating his line in terms of Marxist science.<sup>1</sup> H. Carrère d'Encausse and S. R. Schram, trying to prove Lenin to have been voluntaristic, take out of the context his well-known statement (in a debate on trade unions) about politics having priority over economics to make it out as a "basic trait of his whole system of thought". "This trait," they write, "is particularly evident precisely in Lenin's ideas regarding the evolution of the non-European countries. In Russia, the working class, although a minority, was relatively strong and concentrated. One could therefore find a certain justification for attributing the leading role to this class, or to the party which was supposed to represent it. The situation in Asia

<sup>1</sup> Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

was quite different. Economically and numerically, the working class was infinitely weaker there than in Russia. Under such conditions, to postulate a revolution led by a Marxist party signified, even more than in Russia, giving politics priority over economics."<sup>1</sup> The authors of this inference ignored one particular circumstance they knew quite well: Lenin never urged an immediate revolution under the leadership of Marxist parties in the colonies and dependent countries. It was Roy who did that, while Lenin took issue with him, arguing that a bourgeois-democratic stage was logically unavoidable and never ruling out the possibility of bourgeois-democratic leadership at that stage.

Finally, one more reflection of the idea of opposition between "European" and "Asian" Marxism in the bourgeois interpretation of the history of the communist movement in India is the assertion that both Lenin, while formulating his theory on the national and colonial question, and the Comintern, in its entire policy towards India, guided themselves by Russia's interests alone rather than the interests of the revolutionary forces of India. That was a traditional theme for anti-communist propaganda back in the period between the two world wars and in the 1940s and the 1950s, with some new shades of meaning added to it now.

The idea of the existence of Asian and European communism is bound to prompt the opposition between the interests of Russia and those of Indian revolutionaries. There is nothing surprising about the fact that the "interests of Moscow" should have been interpreted in an extremely illogical way to suit that far-fetched concept. H. Carrère d'Encausse and S.R. Schram begin by saying that Lenin's and the Comintern's concern with regard to all Asian countries was "to develop methods for the conquest of power adapted to the peculiar conditions prevailing in Asian societies". Conquest of power by whom and why? The authors give no explicit answer to this question, but argue in such a way as to present the Comintern as opposed by Chinese Communists who, they claim, contemplated not only new techniques for seizing power, but aimed at breaking new paths in the revolutionary transformation of society as well.<sup>2</sup> But if the Comin-

<sup>1</sup>Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, Stuart R. Schram, *Op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. VIII.

tern was concerned, among other things, with organising communists for the conquest of power, could anyone imagine that power without the kind of revolutionary change like that which had been made in Russia? We are not going to revert at this point to the question of whether or not the conquest of power was the immediate objective formulated by Lenin and the Comintern. Let us confine ourselves to noting this strange denial of the interest of the international communist movement in the development of revolutionary processes in the East. H. Carrère d'Encausse and S. R. Schram go on to try and motivate this reference of theirs with regard to India: "The idea that temporarily the Communists should allow the bourgeoisie to retain the hegemony over the revolutionary movement was implicit in Lenin's theses [let us recall that Lenin had been accused earlier of a voluntaristic approach for having supposedly urged a revolution led by a Marxist party—*Auth.*] Such an attitude was natural in the case of Lenin, whose principal concern, as head of the Soviet Government, was to find allies capable of weakening the rear of the colonial powers which were adopting a hostile and threatening attitude towards his regime in Europe. It could not satisfy an Asian revolutionary, who had no intention of accepting indefinitely the domination of the bourgeoisie of his own country. Here, too, the debate between Lenin and Roy constitutes a prefiguration of the conflict between the diplomatic interests of the Soviet Union and the natural ambitions of the revolutionaries of Asia and Africa which runs through the whole history of Soviet foreign policy, from the Turkey of Kemal to Nasser's Egypt."<sup>1</sup>

So, Lenin and the Comintern are said to have been in the wrong on every occasion. When they were supposedly calling for an immediate revolution under the hegemony of the proletariat and under the leadership of a Marxist party, they were wrong because they failed to take into account the specific conditions of Asia and approached the problem from a voluntaristic standpoint. When, however, they warned against rushing a socialist revolution and declared for entering into alliance with bourgeois anti-imperialists and even accepting their leadership, which does correspond

<sup>1</sup> Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, Stuart R. Schram, *Op. cit.*, p. 28.



to Lenin's policy on the national and colonial question, they were accused of being unrevolutionary and of looking for allies to fight imperialism with, rather than support the revolution in India. (One can presume that the development of the revolution in India and the coming of a revolutionary government to power would supposedly have failed to weaken imperialism in the greatest possible measure and to make India the most reliable and strongest ally of Soviet Russia.) At the same time, Roy, with a voluntaristic approach that was typical of him, and notably, with his idea of Marxist leadership of the liberation struggle from the very outset, has been portrayed as a model of a true Asian revolutionary.

That these are inconsistent constructs is only too obvious. The only logic behind them, if any, is that everything that had its origin in the Comintern was bad and an obstacle to the development of the revolution in India, while, conversely, all the ideas of the opponents of the Comintern's line were expressive of an authentically Asian approach to revolution.

That kind of criticism of the Comintern holds no water. But for want of any better, it has been kept up in bourgeois propaganda for over two decades. H. Carrère d'Encausse's and S. R. Schram's constructs, designed to prove Lenin's line on the national and colonial question as applied to India to have been anti-revolutionary, are not new. These authors almost textually reproduce Overstreet's and Windmiller's arguments dating from 1959: "The Russian leaders, interested above all in undermining British power through destroying its colonial props, naturally proposed the anti-imperialist strategy of working with bourgeois nationalism; Indian revolutionaries, such as Roy, interested above all in converting a free India into a socialist India, favoured the anti-capitalist strategy of working against bourgeois nationalism."<sup>1</sup> In this case, too, anti-imperialism and an alliance with national bourgeois elements to that end have been opposed to socialist revolution at the authors' own discretion. They failed to escape a clash between that artificial construction of theirs and a recognition of the beneficial influence which Lenin's line of alliance with the

<sup>1</sup> Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, pp. 529-30.

national revolutionary elements invariably had and could have to a still greater extent, had it been constantly and consistently carried into effect, on the development of the communist movement in India.<sup>1</sup>

So, it was enough for Roy to have come forward with his particular stand on the national and colonial question, which was at variance with Lenin's principles, to be elevated to the rank of a true Asian Marxist and revolutionary. This has been done along with producing the argument that Roy's position shaped up under the impact of the various developments in Indian life which he knew and which Lenin's theory failed to reflect.<sup>2</sup> That is wrong. Roy came to Moscow after long wanderings far away from India and, as he wrote in his recollections, he had had no contact at all with his native land while he stayed in Mexico. His attitude to Indian bourgeois democracy had developed under the influence of the policy of the moderate sections in the INC who prevailed after the defeat of the movement of 1906-1908. Roy did not know the INC renovated by the activities of Mahatma Gandhi and by mass civil disobedience campaigns, as well as by the revolutionary upsurge in the country brought about by the October Revolution and the end of World War I. His particular stand at the Second Congress of the Comintern had not been produced on the Indian national soil. Neither in 1920, nor at a later stage did Roy feel any respect for or even tolerated the customs and traditions of India, the life-style and mentality of the Indian peasantry and the religious creeds of the majority of the Indian population. He invariably and honestly wished well to India and her people, but self-righteously believed that since he had indicated the way for India to progress, she was bound to follow it because the merits and inevitability of that way stood proved. The class interests, political and cultural level of the masses, the political situation, etc., did not look to Roy to be the factors which were to mould a revolutionary. Roy qualified the diversity of the political trends in India, which had a history and traditions of their own, a social base and real class interests and, therefore,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 533-34.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Philip Spratt, "Two Notes on M. N. Roy and His Ideas". In: *M. N. Roy—Philosopher-Revolutionary*, p. 37.

were objectively indispensable in large measure, as “the lunatic asylum of Indian politics” with his own followers being “the only sane group” in it.<sup>1</sup> John Haithcox, who has studied a vast amount of factual material, including some borrowed from archives, and published some of it, writes that Roy’s “alienation from Indian culture and society, his distrust of the peasantry, and his atheism caused him to stumble”<sup>2</sup>. True, it is Marxism that this American scholar blames for it: “Although Roy was aware of the need to modify the Marxian political formula to meet objective conditions, in India that formula was not sufficiently flexible for the task.”<sup>3</sup> But it is clear to any unbiassed person that it is exactly tolerance and patience that Lenin urged Roy to exercise along with that very flexibility in the application of the principles of scientific socialism to the Indian conditions which, in Haithcox’s opinion, was disallowed by Marxist science and which the Indian Marxist, Roy, simply lacked in actual practice.

One of Roy’s associates, V. M. Tarkunde, who broke away from his group in the early 1940s, said that the Royists “were suffering from ‘ultra-leftism’, but instead of being the ‘infantile disorder’ of which Lenin spoke, it was the result of ‘overrationalism’. The Royists, in his judgement, were sacrificing their movement “on the altar of rationalist purity”.<sup>4</sup>

So, what Roy put before the Comintern was not a specifically Indian line of approach, but one of the commonly known variations of deviation from Marxism-Leninism—leftism. Roy’s position verged on Trotskyism. “In the past, Roy and Trotsky had been in agreement on at least one thing—their opposition to any strategy based on support of bourgeois nationalism in the colonial and semi-colonial areas,”<sup>5</sup> Overstreet and Windmiller write. In actual fact, the coincidence of their views had been much greater than Roy would admit it. Coming forward years after

with a critical assessment of Trotsky as a person and as a politician, Roy wrote that “all along, ever since his opposition to the New Economic Policy [this continued until the late 1920s—*Auth.*], I was inclined to take up Trotsky’s point of view”.<sup>1</sup>

All attempts at presenting Lenin as a voluntarist alleged to have reduced Marxism merely to a technique for engineering coups d’etat and to have set off Roy against him as a man who always showed a feeling for the broader social effects of political changes are a far cry from what is required to establish the truth.<sup>2</sup> Roy himself never underestimated Lenin. He had the courage to admit the immaturity of his views of 1920 and expressed his admiration not only for Lenin’s personal characteristics as the leader of the masses, but for the objectivity and scientific justification of his approach to identifying the political course to follow. “Lenin believed in his power to build, to create something great,” Roy wrote. “But he knew that he must create out of material which was not within himself. In other words, the unfolding of his creative genius was dependent upon numerous other factors.... With all my strong dislike for Trotsky’s personal characteristics I also made the mistake of considering his attitude more revolutionary. But ... I could learn and gradually attain the maturity of intelligence necessary for discriminating unostentatious solidity from imposing flares. So imperceptible was my political differentiation from that of Trotsky that he was shocked at my ‘defection’. That was in the historic session of the Executive Committee of the Communist International towards the end of 1927, when Trotsky was removed from its membership.”<sup>3</sup>

But in 1920 Roy was still a long way off from this change of views.

<sup>1</sup> M. N. Roy, *Men I Met*, Lalvani Publishing House, Bombay, 1968, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, the article by Philip Spratt, a former British Communist, one of the defendants in the Meerut Case, who subsequently betrayed the communist movement, just as Roy did (Philip Spratt, *Op. cit.*, p. 37).

<sup>3</sup> M. N. Roy, *Op. cit.*, pp. 40, 43-44.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 294.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 258.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>5</sup> Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 99.

After the Second Congress of the Comintern, Roy set off for Tashkent to work among the Indian revolutionaries who had emigrated into Soviet Russia. They had formed a communist group which proclaimed itself an Indian Communist party. Roy proposed to make arrangements for a trek of Muslim emigres and detachments made up of borderland tribes to India across Afghanistan. That plan, which Lenin described as utterly unrealistic when he talked to Roy, had to be given up.<sup>1</sup>

In 1922 Roy, together with the Indian foreign communist centre he had set up, moved to Berlin and began to contact the Marxist groups springing up in India, in an effort to coordinate their activities on behalf of the Comintern. Roy's prestige among the members of the early Marxist groups in India was high. They heeded his advice, taking it for the Comintern's line. However, the divergence between Roy's and Lenin's positions, brought out at the Second Congress, was never surmounted. Nor did Roy rid himself of his sectarian views and, although he had to reckon with the Comintern's overall policy on the national and colonial question, these views made themselves felt in his recommendations to the Indian Communists, which were at times marked off by inconsistency and change of principles—from a pursuit of an alliance with the INC, which corresponded to the Comintern's tactics, to attempts at exposing the INC to make it demonstrate its "non-revolutionary character" which betrayed Roy's typical habit of opposing the communist movement to the national liberation movement led by bourgeois democrats.

That tendency was particularly manifest in the "Action Programme of the Indian Congress", written by Roy, which was distributed at the INC Gaya Congress (1922).<sup>2</sup> At a time

<sup>1</sup> For details about Roy's activities in Tashkent see: M. A. Persits, *India's Revolutionaries in Soviet Russia. The Mainsprings of the Indian Communist Movement*; Rostislav Ulyanovsky, *Op. cit.*, pp. 257-64.

<sup>2</sup> *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, Vol. I, People's Publishing House (Private), Ltd., New Delhi, 1977, pp. 577-88. This document was characterised as "extremely sectarian" by the Indian Marxist historian G. Adhikari (*Ibid.*, p. 563).

of a massive anti-British campaign being wound up, the National Congress was confronted with obviously unrealistic objectives which, as Roy admitted, were designed to convince revolutionary forces of the necessity of creating a special mass revolutionary party under the control and direction of the Communists.<sup>1</sup>

There was a certain contradiction in the making between the Comintern's line of principle and the views of Roy who was supposed to stick to it. That attracted and is still attracting the attention of bourgeois scholars. Misinterpreting Comintern policy in India as an attempt at "capturing" the INC rather than acting in alliance with it, they do not equate Roy's and the Comintern's approach as applied to the early 1920s. "In order to satisfy the Comintern that he was carrying out its policy, he was forced to attempt to gain influence in the Congress," Overstreet and Windmiller write. "But he did not cease trying to discredit the Congress in the eyes of the Comintern in the hope of bringing about a revision of its policy."<sup>2</sup>

The ambiguity of Roy's position and his ambition to impose his own concept of the revolutionary movement without openly opposing Lenin's propositions became clear at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. Roy theoretically admitted at that Congress that the bourgeois-nationalist movement in the colonial countries was objectively revolutionary and, consequently, had to be supported. But he made a reservation in the same breadth by saying that an objective force cannot be seen as unconditional, for one has to take into account the specific historical circumstances in every particular case. The bourgeoisie, Roy argued, becomes a revolutionary factor whenever it raises the banner of struggle against the feudal order of society, while in India, from his point of view, things were different. Roy subdivided the colonial countries into three groups: 1) the countries with advanced capitalism and class differentiation, 2) the countries with a low level of capitalist development and with a preponderance of feudal relations, and 3) the countries dominated by primitive or feudal-patriarchal conditions. Roy put India into the first group. The

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 595.

<sup>2</sup> Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

evaluation of its revolutionary potential which Roy brought up at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern squared perfectly with the book *India in Transition*<sup>1</sup> he published in 1922 which, as regards the assessment of the policy of imperialism and the position of national capital, can be seen as an anticipation of Roy's somewhat later theory of "decolonisation". Roy's book opened with the claim that India could not be considered a feudal country because it was the bourgeoisie which was rising and which had already done much to strengthen its foothold that was her major political factor. He presented its political evolution in the following way. Restricted by the narrow possibilities of development for industry, the bourgeoisie started a political struggle against British imperialism. The political consciousness of the masses was growing parallel with the development of bourgeois nationalism. Imperialists were yielding ground to the bourgeoisie in order to forestall an alliance between the bourgeoisie and the masses which could undermine British rule. These concessions induced the bourgeoisie to waver. On the one hand, it realised only too well that its bargaining chips in confrontation with the British authorities were as high as the degree achieved in the revolutionary commitment of the masses, while, on the other, it feared lest the political activity of the masses should put its own existence at stake. That is why one ought to expect the bourgeoisie to agree to a compromise arrangement with imperialism and to relinquish all revolutionary role of its own. Roy's ultimate conclusion was that the bourgeoisie would be acting in step with the masses until a certain limit beyond which it would attempt to halt the revolution, that in the relatively developed colonial countries it would betray the cause of national liberation. That is to say that the main task was to train genuinely revolutionary forces capable of assuming the leadership of the national liberation movement in a not too distant future.<sup>2</sup>

Roy's position, which combined erroneous and correct points, was, by and large, a far-fetched skeleton position

<sup>1</sup> See: Manabendra Nath Roy, *India in Transition*, Edition de la Librairie J. B. Target, Geneva, 1922.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Bulletin of the IV Congress of the Communist International*, Moscow, No. 19, 1922, p. 26.

based on a number of factual errors and theoretical misconceptions. Subsequently, Roy admitted that he had overestimated the development of capitalism in India and relied on unconfirmed statistical data.<sup>1</sup> But that strikes at the very root of his entire concept. Since the level of capitalist development is overplayed, the same should be said about imperialism's concessions to the Indian bourgeoisie and about the degree of the political maturity of the workers and peasants and, consequently, about the readiness of national capital for a compromise with imperialism. Roy did have some happy ideas about the duality of the position of the bourgeoisie and of its waverings which had originated already in the theses he had submitted to the Second Congress of the Comintern,<sup>2</sup> but his conviction that national capital was bound to break with the masses before the attainment of national independence prompted him to take up a sectarian stand. This has been disproved by the history of the national liberation movement in India and in other countries. Roy underestimated the power of feudal relations in India to survive and totally disregarded imperialism's policy of teaming up with feudal reaction, rather than with national capital. Yet the major flaw of Roy's platform was his failure to understand the modifications which the national anti-imperialist struggle was making within the alignment of class forces. Roy forgot about the extremely intricate interlocking of class and national interests, class and national consciousness in India as well as about the fact that national aims were objectively put into the foreground there. That was a measure of his divorce from Indian realities, while many bourgeois commentators have been depicting him as a true "Asian Marxist" and opposing him to the "European" or "Russian" Marxist—Lenin.

The Fourth Congress of the Comintern, favouring the idea of a united anti-imperialist front, rejected Roy's argument about the inevitable betrayal by national capital of the cause of the liberation of the colonies in relatively developed countries. Nevertheless, Roy was elected first alternate member and then full member of the ECCI and memb-

<sup>1</sup> *M. N. Roy's Memoirs*, Allied Publishers (Private), Ltd., Bombay, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> See: G. Adhikari, "Lenin on Roy's Supplementary Colonial Theses", *Marxist Miscellany*, Delhi, No. 1, 1970, pp. 6, 15.

er of the Presidium of the Comintern.

Roy upheld his views at the Fifth Congress of the Comintern as well. These were not accepted again, although some of the leaders of the international communist movement had by then developed sectarian tendencies of their own which were close to Roy's concepts.<sup>1</sup> In 1926 Roy published the book *The Future of Indian Politics* in which he maintained that the nationalist bourgeoisie had already separated itself from the revolutionary masses and was seeking to make a united front with the imperialist forces.<sup>2</sup> This book is noteworthy because it expresses an attitude to the INC in connection with the lively debate that was going on in the Comintern and among Indian revolutionaries over the question of creating mass revolutionary parties which would help towards radicalising the anti-imperialist movement and bringing democratic elements into a closer relationship with the Communists.

The need for the creation of such parties began to be felt in India in the early 1920s. Certain gains of the communist movement were evident by then. These resulted in the founding of the Communist Party of India in 1925. Yet the Marxist vanguard was in difficulty trying to contact the democratic and nationalist elements who would not accept Marxist ideology. At the same time, the early stirrings of the Indian Communists brought on harsh reprisals by the British Government (as evidenced by the anti-communist trials at Peshawar and Kanpur in 1923-1924). Prominent Indian Marxists, in particular active trade unionists, were thrown behind bars. The legal activity of Communists became extremely difficult. All that combined prompted the conclusion that the consistently Marxist vanguard, having to operate underground, would do well to act together with a legal mass revolutionary party putting forward democratic demands, which the Communists could rely on.

Roy was one of the protagonists of that idea, but he introduced leftist elements into it. His programme for the Revolutionary Nationalist Party (1924) comprised, along

<sup>1</sup> See: *The Comintern and the East*, Moscow, 1979, p. 170.

<sup>2</sup> See: M. N. Roy, *The Future of Indian Politics*, Published by R. Bishop, London, 1926, pp. 78, 90.

with the points calling for national independence, abolition of feudalism and landlordism, nationalisation of land, mines, and public utilities,<sup>1</sup> which was unacceptable to the bulk of the INC members. On the other hand, true to his own concept of an inevitable betrayal by national capital and of the necessity of the working-class party's hegemony in the anti-imperialist movement, Roy was coming round in the 1920s to seeing a mass revolutionary party not as a means of broadening the base for the communist movement, which by no means ruled out an alliance with bourgeois nationalism, but as a kind of a substitute for the INC which, he argued, had proved its non-revolutionary character. In *The Future of Indian Politics* Roy, considering it to be the pressing task before the Indian revolutionaries to organise the forces of the nationalist movement into a democratic party, declared that "none of the existing Nationalist parties can serve the purpose". Overstreet and Windmiller are right when they say that Roy's democratic party was to be "a new Congress, minus its bourgeois element".<sup>2</sup>

That concept rested on an obvious overestimation of the influence of the anti-imperialist forces, those of the Communists above all. Indian Marxists realised that, Roy's prestige in their midst began to decline, his policy touched off displeasure, and attempts were even made to eschew Roy's mediation in relations with the Comintern.

#### THE SIXTH CONGRESS AND ROY'S EXPULSION FROM THE COMINTERN

The foregoing was an account of the conflict between Lenin's strategy of alliance of all anti-imperialist forces and Roy's sectarian and dogmatic ambitions as it developed since it broke out at the Second Congress of the Comintern until the late 1920s.

A political line with a certain touch of sectarianism with respect to the national bourgeoisie of the colonial and dependent countries prevailed for a time in the Comintern

<sup>1</sup> See: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 84.

where Roy was not alone to uphold the leftist trends in dealing with the national and colonial question. That line found expression in the documents and resolutions of the Ninth Plenum of the ECCI (February 1928) and of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern. Although the deliberations and resolutions of that Congress revealed a clash of conflicting trends,<sup>1</sup> the dominant argument was that the national bourgeoisie had essentially lost the character of an anti-imperialist force and that the hegemony of the proletariat in the national liberation movement was becoming a condition for its success. There was sharp criticism of petty-bourgeois parties and groups. These parties were recognised as revolutionary only in their opening stages, while their transition to the positions of national reformism was believed preordained and, consequently, the Communists were called upon not so much to strive for an alliance with petty-bourgeois radicals as to challenge them for the influence over the working masses.

At that time Roy, just back from China where he had been delegated by the Comintern, did not believe at all that Chiang Kai-shek's betrayal was enough to warrant a change of principle in the policy on the national and colonial question in other countries, notably in India. Roy's views underwent deep change in 1928-1929. He began to realise that his policy was out of keeping with the Indian conditions. The fresh winds in the Congress and throughout the country made a great impression on him. In 1927 the Indian liberation movement passed through a turning point. The stalemate which followed the defeat of the 1919-1922 "civil disobedience campaign" gave way to a new upswing. The rise of the working-class and peasant movement and the revolutionising of the urban petty bourgeoisie served to strengthen the positions of the INC's left wing led by Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose. The annual session of the Congress in Madras in 1927 voted to accept Jawaharlal Nehru's resolution demanding full independence and a boycott of the Simon Commission which was sent by London. When the moderates, who had the report by Motilal Nehru as their banner, brought the INC back to accepting the slogan of dominion, the left set up the Indian

<sup>1</sup> See: *The Comintern and the East*, pp. 187, 190-91, 434-41.

League for Independence whose programme did not only call for full independence but proclaimed that "socialism must be one of the aims of the movement" and spoke up for removal of economic inequalities, equitable redistribution of wealth, nationalisation of key industries and transport services. It demanded "the introduction of a uniform system of land tenure with the annulment of agricultural indebtedness and even abolition of landlordism for the peasants".<sup>1</sup>

Faced by the obvious radicalising of the Indian liberation movement, Roy admitted that it was contrary to logic to renounce an alliance with democratic elements and urged the continuation of the united front policy which was the Comintern's tradition.

The changes of principle in Roy's approach at the time were obvious. However, it would be wrong to presume that Roy advocated "a four-class united front policy for India", as Haithcox writes,<sup>2</sup> and that at a time when there was a trend towards sectarianism within the Comintern Roy was the only one to stick to the correct position in the national and colonial question (as the Indian Royists believed).

In actual fact, Roy's new platform was a mixture of his earlier leftist ambitions with Lenin's idea of a united front of anti-imperialist forces. Roy's attitude to the national bourgeoisie—the major object of controversy between him and Lenin—remained unchanged. It showed itself in the resolution on "decolonisation" which Roy submitted to the Comintern soon after his return from China. The "decolonisation" thesis came under harsh, yet generally fair criticism at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, if misaccentuated sometimes. Roy was reproached from time to time with having propagated certain views which implied that imperialism was going to lead the Indian people to its freedom by the hand. That was wrong. Roy never brought to an extreme his ideas about the concessions which, he claimed, imperialism was prepared to make for the national bourgeoisie in fear of the mass movement, neither did he

<sup>1</sup> Clemens Dutt, "The Indian League for Independence", *Labour Monthly*, Vol. XI, No. 1, 1929, pp. 26-28.

<sup>2</sup> John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 88.

write off the contradictions between imperialism and the national interests, nor did he doubt the necessity of extending and radicalising the liberation struggle. His "decolonisation" theory reflected, to a certain extent, some new trends in the policy of imperialism which were to be seen only in broad outline after the First World War and in the 1920s. Later on, at the time of the collapse of world colonialism, those trends, having developed into a ramified system of political and economic measures, came to be defined as "neo-colonialism" in Marxist theory.

Roy's basic idea in his "decolonisation" theory was that the bourgeoisie, getting an opportunity, through the concessions made by the imperialists, of competing with them in the exploitation of the masses, had exhausted its revolutionary potential and ceased to be an anti-imperialist force.<sup>1</sup> It would be no exaggeration, probably, to say that the theory of "decolonisation" had arisen just as a confirmation and elaboration of that thesis. In that sense the criticism it came under at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern was absolutely correct.

While Roy's attitude to national capital remained unchanged, his views of the petty bourgeoisie did change radically. In the early 1920s, Roy considered the petty bourgeoisie to be a reactionary factor opposed to two advanced forces supporting the nationalist movement—"the progressive bourgeoisie and the militant proletariat".<sup>2</sup> This assessment of the petty bourgeoisie, which can be explained only by the fact that, unlike the national bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the petty bourgeoisie was not associated by Roy with the contemporary mode of production, was the starting point of Roy's evaluation of Gandhism as "the acutest and most desperate manifestation of the forces of reaction".<sup>3</sup> In the latter half of the 1920s, Roy dropped that evaluation of the petty bourgeoisie. "The future of Indian politics (of national liberation) will, therefore, be determined by the social forces which still remain and will always remain antagonistic to imperialism," he wrote in

<sup>1</sup> See: Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, pp. 103, 104.

<sup>2</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 3, No. 21, 1923, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> Manabendra Nath Roy, *India in Transition*, p. 205.

1926. "These social forces are composed of the workers, peasantry and the petty bourgeoisie (small traders, artisans, employees, students, petty intellectuals, etc.)."<sup>1</sup> The book *The Future of Indian Politics*, just quoted, is usually viewed as a systematised exposition of Roy's earlier, sectarian line. However, his position in the interpretation of the alignment of class forces did not change even at the end of the 1920s, although he is commonly believed to have been a partisan of the united front in that period.

In a series of articles published in 1928-1929 Roy, criticising the guidelines of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, singled out the following elements in Indian political life: "class differentiation inside the nationalist ranks, and a resulting radicalisation of the nationalist movement"; the petty bourgeoisie which he had earlier identified with religious and social conservatism was "rapidly outgrowing the leadership of the big bourgeoisie"; socialism, practically unknown in India just a few years before, was now being preached by all petty-bourgeois organisations of the National Congress.<sup>2</sup>

Roy's evaluation of the prospect ahead for left nationalists is very interesting. He believed that they would inevitably fall again under control of the big bourgeoisie or turn into a Social-Democratic party unless the proletarian vanguard led them to a revolution, which Roy saw as the historic mission of the workers' and peasants' parties. He was quite right in considering the renunciation of alliance with the petty-bourgeois groups just when they were in opposition to the INC leadership as profoundly mistaken. So, in the late 1920s Roy advocated an alliance of three, rather than four classes, setting it off against national capital which, he believed, must be dislodged from the leadership of the movement, and still insisted on working-class hegemony in a bloc of left anti-imperialist forces as a condition for the victory of the national revolution. The reason why the alliance with the petty-bourgeois elements proved to be of interest to Roy was not the alliance as such, nor because it had been conditioned by a sustained objective conver-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from: Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> See: *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 8, No. 91, 1928, p. 1733; *Ibid.*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 1929, p. 65.

gence of interests, but only so much as those elements could, as it seemed to him, take the side of the proletariat in the given transitional period and follow it along a consistently revolutionary path. Roy's united front concept of the late 1920s suffered from glaring sectarian flaws which told on his subsequent activities.

To underline the community between Roy's views of the early and the late 1920s does not mean, of course, that there had been no serious change about them. In addition to a changed assessment of the petty bourgeoisie, there were two more things which were extremely essential. First, Roy admitted that the nation was unprepared for an immediate socialist revolution, he realised that the way to communism lay through the national liberation struggle, and called on the Communists to rally the working class and the democratic forces behind a short-term programme, rather than a long-term programme, and to work with the mass organisations to that end. Second, with respect to political and organisational matters, Roy shifted the emphasis from Communist to workers' and peasants' parties. That happened for the following reasons, most likely. The CPI, persecuted by the authorities and mistrusted by the nationalists, was in a tight corner. Its condition was in sharp contrast to the gains of the workers' and peasants' parties whose aims had a pronounced general democratic character. Besides, Roy counted on an early passage of the petty-bourgeois radicals to the consistently revolutionary positions and believed that the platform of the workers' and peasants' parties was to be more acceptable for cooperation with them. That naive faith in winning over petty-bourgeois democracy led Roy to develop a liquidationist attitude towards the CPI and to forget Lenin's principle of safeguarding the organisational and political independence of Communist parties. Roy even advised that the CPI should be disbanded.<sup>1</sup> The warnings of the ECCI and the Sixth Congress of the Comintern about the danger of workers' and peasants' parties turning into petty-bourgeois organisations (although they did achieve some progress in mobilising and rallying the working people), as well as their appeal for action to prevent the CPI from being weakened through

<sup>1</sup> See: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 109.

a search of the form of an alliance with left nationalists were designed to offset Roy's liquidationist aspirations.

Roy was not present at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern. In 1928 he left Moscow for Berlin to contact the leaders of the communist movement opposed to the resolutions of the Sixth Congress. In Berlin, which was then the centre of emigres from British colonies, Roy brought together a group of Indian students to rely on in carrying forward his political activities and propaganda for India. Roy published a series of articles critical of the decisions of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern. Years later Roy would say in his autobiographical notes: "In 1928, I severed my relations with the Communist International for reasons of disagreement regarding both the theory and practice of Communism."<sup>1</sup> In actual fact, he was expelled from the Comintern (in September 1929), and after the Seventh Congress, when he presumed his ideological differences with it to have been reconciled, he applied for reinstatement in that organisation.<sup>2</sup>

In 1930, as stated earlier on, he returned illegally to his native country but had to hide from persecution by the authorities. There was a group of his supporters in Bombay at the time who remained loyal to him until his dying day. At Jawaharlal Nehru's invitation, Roy attended an INC session in Karachi in 1931 under an assumed name. He tabled an amendment declaring the Gandhi-Irwin settlement to be "a betrayal of India by the bourgeoisie", which was turned down.<sup>3</sup> In those years Roy assailed the CPI, claiming that the party was practically non-existent outside Bombay and Calcutta, that its influence among the workers was on the wane and that it was turning into a student movement. The Royists did their bit towards subverting the CPI's influence in the trade unions. They echoed the charge against the Communists alleging them to be playing into Britain's hands and seeking to divide the nationalists. The Communists were labelled "anti-nationalists".<sup>4</sup> Roy himself considered the CPI's line a sheer abstraction.

The CPI did pay some generous tribute to left-sectarian

<sup>1</sup> M. N. Roy—*Philosopher-Revolutionary*, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, pp. 213-14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.



misconceptions in that period which found striking expression in the "Draft Platform of Action of the Communist Party of India".<sup>1</sup> That document announced that the aim of the movement was to establish a Soviet form of government, and create an Indian federal republic of workers and peasants, proclaimed violence as the only possible way of dealing with imperialism and condemned not only Gandhi, but the "left" national reformists", such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, declaring them the most dangerous adversaries of the revolution in India. But at a time when the communist movement in India was up against formidable difficulties both because of changed strategy and because of the reprisals visited upon it in 1928-1929, Roy's criticism was objectively directed not against the left-sectarian strategic line, but against the CPI as such, and it tended to subvert the mass base of the communist movement.

The charge of "anti-nationalism" against Communists which appeared to anticipate the line taken against them by the State prosecutor in the Meerut case, stood in sharp contrast to the widespread public support the Meerut prisoners had. All Indian democrats saw them as victims of the repressive policies of British imperialism designed to crush the national liberation movement. Back in the early 1929, when the government of India tried in vain to get the legislative assembly to pass a Public Safety Bill, providing a legal basis for reprisals, an INC "old guard" veteran Motilal Nehru, pointing out that the Bill was aimed against the INC as much as against the CPI, declared that both parties sought to overthrow the British rule in India and that the only difference between the members of the Congress and the Communists was about the technique, while the essence of the difference was whether or not to resort to violence.<sup>2</sup> That is the opinion of a man far from entertaining any sympathy for the Communists, one of the most prominent leaders of the INC's right wing. It is a kind of reply to the spurious assertions which call in question the CPI's devotion to the cause of national liberation.

<sup>1</sup> This text appeared in *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 10, No. 58, 1930, pp. 1218-22.

<sup>2</sup> See: *The Times*, February 7, 1929.

After Roy and some of his closest associates had been arrested in the middle of 1931, to pursue Roy's line still implied creating two parties—a legal one (this time within the INC framework, although the members of the Congress never supported the idea seeing it as a danger of splitting the INC) and an underground one. Underground groups of Royists were actually set up in some cities. In 1934 they formed what came to be known as the Revolutionary Party of the Indian Working Class.

#### LEFT PARTIES IN THE LATTER HALF OF THE 1930s

The new trends which appeared in Roy's views by the late 1920s manifested themselves in full when he was set free from prison in 1936, resumed full-scale political activity and "began an active effort to reestablish himself as a leader of the Indian Communists".<sup>1</sup>

In that period Roy did not call for any action to achieve the ideals of socialism as an immediate objective of the movement. "Socialism or communism," Roy said, "is not the issue of the day, and Socialists and Communists should realise that the immediate objective is national independence."<sup>2</sup> Roy coupled this correct appreciation with a substantial change in his evaluation of the class forces making up the bedrock of the communist movement. In earlier times Roy used to overplay the maturity of the Indian working class and its readiness to lead the liberation movement and the socialist revolution. Now he ran into another extreme—to a nihilistic assessment of the revolutionary potential of the proletariat, having virtually crossed out the decades that had gone into the moulding of its class consciousness and the performance of the Communist Party of India. In one of his letters, quoted by Haithcox, Roy asserted that "Indian workers are too backward politically to play a completely independent role", and to try to establish an independent organisation would only serve to isolate them from the anticolonialist struggle.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 247.

<sup>3</sup> "Letter from M. N. Roy to August Thalheimer, Dehra Dun, November 4, 1934". In: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 174.

These ideas were originally to be found in the preference which towards the end of the 1920s Roy had given to the workers' and peasants' parties over the Communist Party. Their subsequent development revealed Roy's lack of flexibility as well as his considerable addiction to adventurism. In the Comintern's early years the debate was about creating a Communist party in India, and Roy saw its goals (immediate, not ultimate) as nothing but a socialist revolution and the establishment of a Soviet form of government. When Roy found these unrealistic he began to think of diluting the communist vanguard in a larger democratic and petty-bourgeois movement. The need for the struggle by the Communist party, maintaining its organisational and political independence, for the achievement of the general democratic objectives of the national liberation movement, which Lenin emphasised and which now underlies the tactics of the Communists in the developing countries, turned out to be beyond Roy's comprehension. Hence his venturesome plan to disguise the Communist party and communist ideals and to give a different colouring to them.

Since the mid-1930s Roy's idea of having communism replaced by the "Jacobinism of the 20th century" served for carrying out this plan. In 1940 Roy said outright that Indian Communists should "raise the banner, not of Communism, but of Jacobinism".<sup>1</sup> Roy considered the slogan of "national democratic revolution" to be ideologically due to "petty-bourgeois radicalism" with Jacobinism as its political expression. He saw Jacobinism as Marxism applied to the countries which, like India, had pre-capitalist and capitalist conditions existing side by side. Roy found the historical French Jacobins to have been the "Marxists of their time" and called on Indian Communists to "imitate their Jacobin forebearers". He suggested that materialistic views should be concealed for reasons of expediency, saying that nationalism "will not swallow the whole of Marxism" with its materialism.<sup>2</sup>

Roy saw the "Jacobinism of the 20th century" as a political movement supported by a heterogeneous social base—workers, peasants and the petty bourgeoisie, though

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 171-72.

under proletarian hegemony.<sup>1</sup> On the last point, Roy's views remained unchanged. He believed that in the 20th century Marxism had great opportunities of influencing the Jacobins and that their coming to power would only serve as an intermediate stage in the advance towards socialism.

Nevertheless, Roy's idea of the "Jacobinism of the 20th century" appears to have been fruitful. Even now, three decades later, the policy of petty-bourgeois radicals who have come to power in a number of countries of Asia and Africa brings to one's mind an association with the Jacobinism of the French Revolution of the late 18th century. The stage of a "Jacobin type" cannot be ruled out for certain developing countries. The ideas about Marxism's powerful impact on the "Jacobinism of the 20th century" and about the possibilities of the latter's evolution towards Marxism are also interesting and quite realistic. That way to achieve socialism cannot be excluded at all, in point of principle, and, in fact, it is meant precisely as one of the variations of present-day Marxist concepts of non-capitalist development. Roy was mistaken not in having turned to the experience of a relatively distant revolutionary past, put in having attempted to draw upon that experience uncritically and unmindful of the new conditions as they existed in the 20th century. Roy wanted to reduce the communist movement to the level of Jacobinism, to dissolve it and make it part and parcel of petty-bourgeois radicalism which was foreign to it in principle, and to induce the Communists to play the role of Jacobins instead of building relations between Communists and "Jacobins" as between two allied, though independent, trends, that is, without sacrificing the political and organisational possibilities of the communist movement as the most consistent revolutionary force of the 20th century.

Reminiscences of the Jacobin Convent were behind one of central ideas of Roy's programme of the 1930s, the idea of a constituent assembly. With that assembly dominated by the "Jacobins", Roy hoped to turn it into a vehicle of the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry under working-class hegemony on the understanding that this dictatorship would acquire right away some of the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

features appropriate to a socialist state.<sup>1</sup> Such a constituent assembly was to spring from a popular uprising. Roy called for the role of the local committees of the National Congress to be raised and for them to be converted into a network of democratically elected parallel bodies of government which were to become the backbone of the new state after the revolution. The appeal for an election to the national constituent assembly was to serve as the signal for an insurrection at local level with the slogan of "all Power to the Congress Committees". Subsequently, these committees were to elect their representatives to a constituent assembly.<sup>2</sup>

The project for a constituent assembly brought some new elements into Roy's political line of the 1930s, that is, after his release from prison. In earlier times Roy had opposed the Congress, finding it to be incapable of leading the struggle for national liberation. Now Roy intended to fight for independence not even together with the Congress but through the Congress, winning over the masses and trying to take advantage of that most authoritative political organisation of the country. Once out of jail, he became an INC member. "My message to the people," Roy said in November 1936, "is to rally in the millions under the flag of the National Congress and fight for freedom.... We should realise that the National Congress is our common platform."<sup>3</sup> Roy claimed that it was through the INC only that contact with the mass of the Indian people could be made.

The Congress, Roy imagined, should not remain unchanged. He still believed that the nation's democratic forces had "to free an essentially revolutionary movement for national independence from the leadership of the bourgeoisie",<sup>4</sup> from Gandhi and from the "old guard". But while in earlier days Roy considered resolving that problem without the Congress, opposing to it a communist-oriented revolutionary mass party, since the mid-1930s he referred to work inside the Congress and to action to win over the Congress, to rid it from the influence of Gandhism and from that of the bourgeoisie which was supporting its tactics in

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, pp. 172-73.

<sup>2</sup> See: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 174.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

the liberation movement and to turn the INC into a revolutionary people's party, a party of the Jacobins. Those changes in the political course led to Roy's particular view of united front tactics.

Faced by the objection that such a policy was unrealistic in respect of the party of the Indian national bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeois elements, Roy replied that the Congress was a mass nationalist movement and as such was not objectively the party of any particular class.<sup>1</sup> Roy and his supporters saw the Congress in the 1930s as synonymous to a united national front.<sup>2</sup> Hence, all attempts of left forces to create an organisation of working people and revolutionary elements, independent of the Congress, with a view to their class and political self-determination, were opposed since, in Roy's opinion, they tended to weaken the Congress and, consequently, ran counter to the united front policy.

Roy invariably stuck to that position whenever he saw the forces left of the Congress leadership show a determination to achieve independence to the extent of an autonomy. He sought to prove that the organisation of a Congress Socialist party would lead to the expulsion of the left wing from the INC and weaken its influence, that the formation of a party inside the Congress would prevent it from accepting an alternative to Gandhi's programme for a national revolution, and that an ill-timed propagation of socialist slogans, in his opinion, would divide the Congress between the proponents and opponents of socialism whereas the actual watershed should pass between militant nationalists, on the one hand, and Gandhians, on the other.<sup>3</sup>

The same considerations prompted Roy's reaction to the peasant, youth and trade unions being established by Communists and Socialists, as well as to the idea of their collective admission to the INC.

The workers' and peasants' movement went into high gear in India in the latter half of the 1930s. Radical class demands were put forward through the All-India Kisan

<sup>1</sup> "Letter from M. N. Roy to August Thalheimer, Dehra Dun, November 4, 1934". In: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> "Letter of Resignation of Bengal Royists from CSP, Bombay, July 17, 1937". In: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, pp. 249-50.

Sabha (peasant league), created with the active participation of Communists and Socialists in January 1936, and its local bodies, as well as through the trade unions. The Indian Communists, just as Socialists and other left elements in the Congress, considered these organisations as their own social base and as an effective instrument of pressure on the INC leadership and one of fighting for consistent anti-imperialist, democratic social reforms and the pressing needs of the working people. This implied merging the national anti-imperialist movement with the workers' and peasants' struggle for their rights. But that was entirely at variance with the theories of Gandhi and the right wing of the Congress whose strategy was confined to a purely anti-imperialist struggle with the class interests of the workers and peasants artificially detached from it. Gandhi did his best to avoid the fusion of the trade union movement with the political struggle as well as independent political action by the working people, above all the resort to such a purely proletarian method of political warfare as strike action. When peasant unions began to be formed, Gandhi saw them right away as a threat to the hegemony of the Congress and even declared in 1938 that the only object in setting up independent peasant organisations was to capture the Congress.

The issue of peasant and trade unions became quite dramatic in the latter half of the 1930s because of the proposals for their collective membership of the INC. The left parties saw collective membership as a way of democratising the Congress. An appropriate resolution was moved by Socialists at the Lucknow Congress in 1936 and seconded by Communists and by the entire left wing of the INC with Jawaharlal Nehru at the head. Yet it was defeated by the centre-right majority which was joined by Roy and his supporters. The same happened at the Faizpur Congress of the INC a year later. The right-wing majority opposed the idea of including mass organisations of working people by a resolution providing for a link with the masses through a Congress organisation. A Mass Contacts Committee of the Congress Party was set up with Roy on it.

Naturally, the positions of Roy and right-wing Congress leaders were diametrically opposite. Roy was not afraid of the workers' and peasants' movement but, true to his idea

of capturing the Congress, he wanted that movement to stay within the Congress framework. Instead of galvanising the peasant and trade unions, he called for the peasants and workers to join the Congress, for the Congress to adopt their social programme, for its local committees to become the vehicles of struggle for the interests of the working people, as well as for the INC structure to be democratised to make it an elective institution while its lower echelons and rank-and-file members were to be offered greater opportunities to influence the formulation of the political course. But insofar as the INC party machinery was in the hands of the bourgeois leaders, both at national and local level, and because neither Roy nor any of his associates were strong enough to wrest that machinery from these leaders or even diminish their control (which they were to see for themselves soon afterwards), Roy turned out to be opposing the only possible means of increasing the influence of the democratic elements in the Indian liberation movement, that is, their independent organisation. Roy's line of approach was objectively converging with that of the INC leadership. They even used similar arguments in their effort to prove the need to consolidate the Congress for the sake of the struggle for independence. "A federated body, composed of autonomous organisations ... cannot lead the revolutionary struggle for the capture of power,"<sup>1</sup> Roy wrote as he commented on the issue of collective membership of the INC. In spite of his subjective revolutionary impulses he, in point of fact, was in that particular case acting along with Gandhi who was still insisting that there was no need for independent peasant organisations and got a resolution accepted at the annual INC session in Haripur in 1938 warning the Congressmen against any act of solidarity with the peasant leagues along with urging them instead to devote all their energies to strengthening the Congress committees in the countryside. That was the upshot of Roy's misinterpretation of the actual possibilities of struggle.

When he was released from prison in 1936, Roy obtained a prominent position in Indian political life "because of his revolutionary past". He was popular, his name was seen as a

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 261.

symbol of uncompromising struggle against imperialism, he was listened to, and young men flocked to him.<sup>1</sup> "But this advantage was quickly dissipated," Haithcox pointed out. "The Royists by their policies soon isolated themselves from virtually all other groups within the Congress Party."<sup>2</sup> Roy's group was declining, both in numbers and in influence,<sup>3</sup> which led to its political collapse.

Being as he was a partisan of united national front, Roy failed to get along with those political forces which were closest to him. He intended to push the Congress leftward not by relying on the organisations of left forces which had arisen or were in the making, but bypassing them.

Neither did Roy find a way of getting along with the Communist Party of India, first and foremost. True, while still in prison, Roy recommended to his supporters to work for an association with the Indian Communists. But, of course, his own conflict with the Comintern and his manifestly negative attitude to the CPI in the late 1920s and the early 1930s were not helpful to this end. The main obstacle, however, in the way of an alliance of two political trends acting under the banner of Marxism was the fundamental divergence of their political strategies. Roy saw a united front in an entirely different way from the concept of the CPI and the Comintern. Roy's tactics were directed against the CPI's independent action and against its influence being spread to the workers' and peasants' organisations. Roy consigned to oblivion the principle of independent organisation, which was unquestionable for the Communists since the Second Congress of the Comintern, and developed liquidationist trends with respect to the CPI, which he showed first back in the 1920s.

Haithcox points out that the programme of Roy's supporters was the closest of all political trends to the Congress Socialist Party (CSP). They were united by a determination to work within the Congress for the achievement of political independence and for the implementation of social and economic reforms as well as by the rejection of Gandhi's

<sup>1</sup> See: Subhas Chandra Bose, *The Indian Struggle 1920-1942*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1964, pp. 327-28.

<sup>2</sup> John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 252.

<sup>3</sup> See: David N. Druhe, *Op. cit.*, p. 153.

ideas of non-violence and trusteeship.<sup>1</sup> However, Roy did not go as far as to establish the unity of action with the Socialists either.

In has been pointed out earlier on that Roy saw the creation of an autonomous Socialist party as a danger of weakening the INC left wing. When that party sprang up (in 1934) and went on record for cooperation of all left groups, Roy's reaction to it was sceptical. Having studied Roy's archives, Haithcox writes that Roy regarded the Socialists as merely a "vague, heterogeneous radical tendency in the national movement" and suspected that they could "degenerate" into "reformism", that is, into "bourgeois-parliamentarianism".<sup>2</sup> Both Roy's assessment and his forecast proved right. The Congress Socialist Party did represent a fragile association of groups of different political convictions with nothing to keep them together beyond a disappointment over Gandhi's course and the INC leadership. Some of the Congress Socialists (Jay Prakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Deva) considered themselves Marxists, while another group (Minoo R. Masani and Asoka Mehta) aspired to "democratic socialism" and still another (Ram Lohia) had the socialist trends of Gandhi's utopian doctrine of *sarvodaya* as their starting point. As Haithcox points out, "socialism at this time was in vogue among young, educated Indians, but it more closely represented an ill-defined sentiment than a distinct ideology".<sup>3</sup>

It may well be that Roy's sceptical attitude to the socialism of the Congressmen had enough reason to justify it. But while regarding the members of the Congress Socialist Party as bad Socialists, one could just as well give a positive assessment of their anti-imperialist and democratic potential as radical nationalists. Roy proved incapable of such a differentiated approach. Having admitted that the national liberation, rather than the socialist revolution, was the order of the day, Roy could not make the next move by recognising the need for an alliance at that stage with the political trends having a stake in the achievement of independence, although being inconsistent in their view of socialism.

<sup>1</sup> See: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

During the united front period, too, Roy stuck to his conviction that “unless the party of the working class can become an effective political force and assume the leadership of the anti-imperialist struggle, not in word but in practice, the political perspective of the country is dark”.<sup>1</sup> It is from that point of view that he approached the problem of alliances in the national liberation movement. The only force that could be his ally was the one that would help towards converting the party of the proletariat into a supreme force in the anti-imperialist struggle. In doubt as to the seriousness of the socialist convictions of the Socialists, Roy, guided by his own leftist principles, refused to cooperate with them. Roy saw the difference between the socialist and radical-nationalist potential of the Congress Socialist Party as no more than a difference between good and bad Socialists. Ignoring the objective reasons for an alliance with the Socialist Party as a whole, Roy singled out the most radical leaders within it and urged support for them alone in the hope of raising their influence and transforming the party into “the rallying ground of the radical elements of the de-classed intellectuals—the elements objectively heading toward the party of the proletariat”.<sup>2</sup> To support those hopefuls, in Roy’s opinion, called for severe criticism of the inconsistency and vacillations of the Socialist Party as a whole.

When the Congress Socialist Party was formed, most of the Royists became active in it and influenced its policy guidelines, notably on such important issues as the recognition of the struggle for independence, rather than for socialism, as its immediate concern, and of the idea of a constituent assembly. However, Roy assailed the Socialists’ platform and in March 1937 his group decided to withdraw from the Congress Socialist Party.

Roy produced a variety of reasons for his break with the Socialists: ideological instability of their leaders, the formulation of a number of radical social demands by Socialists which, in Roy’s opinion, could weaken the unity of the Congress, and excessive hopes the Socialists had for Jawaharlal Nehru to bring the INC to socialism, their

<sup>1</sup> John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 237.

<sup>2</sup> John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 230.

different lines of approach to collective membership and to elections for provincial legislatures (Socialists believed that participation in such elections would be tantamount to a betrayal of the demand of full independence, while Roy favoured that participation because he saw it as a tactic to distract the right forces in the Congress and a way to left leadership).<sup>1</sup> Yet all of these differences eventually stemmed from Roy’s maximalist idea of capturing the Congress as a whole and his reckless ambition to do that without relying on the political groups which actually existed and had a solid social base to stand on, but through a political manoeuvre. In actual fact, since Roy was opposed to an alliance with left parties and factions and to an independent movement and the organisations of workers and peasants, he had no means left of “capturing” the Congress beyond the backstage activity of a group of his followers bereft of a social base and unwilling to support the independent action of the working people for the sake of the utopian ambition to achieve everything at once by capturing the Congress. No wonder that their intention to convert the Indian National Congress into a Jacobin club ended in utter failure.

So, Roy and his group failed to disguise themselves as nationalists, to win the confidence and respect of the Congress or to create their own base within its local organisations. On the other hand, one typical feature of the latter half of the 1930s was a considerable rise of the influence of the left forces in the INC, witness the election of left leaders, Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose, as its presidents. Roy’s group, which had isolated itself from its own objective allies—Communists and Socialists—made no essential contribution to that process of strengthening the left. But when the right wing of the INC, worried by the consolidation of the radical elements, decided to confront them head-on by forcing them to take their choice between Gandhi and Bose, Roy attempted to swing the Congress abruptly to the left.

That happened at the INC session at Tripuri in March 1939. The session had been preceded by an ostentatious resignation of the right-wing members of the INC Working

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

Committee, which made it impossible for the left wing INC chairman Bose to discharge his functions. At that session, the right-wingers tabled a resolution underlining their immutable faith in Gandhi's principles and calling on the INC president to form a Working Committee in line with Gandhi's wishes. It was clear to everybody at the session that the resolution was aimed against Bose, and that meant taking a choice between Gandhi and Bose.

That was an extremely intricate dilemma for the left forces as they realised perfectly well how dangerous the consequences of an INC split could be for the anti-imperialist movement. The Indian Communists spoke up for the INC to stand united. They emphasised that the interests of the liberation movement "demanded not the exclusive leadership of one wing but a *united* leadership under the guidance of Gandhi".<sup>1</sup> The Socialists, who after 1936 had been pressing for left participation in the leadership, rather than for Gandhi's leadership to be replaced by the left, declared themselves neutral. Roy supported Bose. His attitude to that radical, yet controversial leader was not quite positive. A decade later Roy wrote: "In 1938, Subhas Bose could have made history, for good or evil. His weakness plus Sardar's [Patel, right-wing INC leader—*Auth.*] iron will frustrated his ambition and saved the Gandhist Congress."<sup>2</sup> Soon after the Tripuri session, Roy characterised Bose as a fascist sympathiser who was merely exploiting the left-wing groups for his personal purpose.<sup>3</sup> But at the Tripuri session, Roy decided to take advantage of the right versus left confrontation in the hope that he could see the INC turned into a party of the "Jacobins of the 20th century". The results, however, were exactly opposite. They showed that Bose enjoyed no majority support. When Gandhi refused to cooperate with him in forming the Working Committee, Bose had to resign. It was Rajendra Prasad who became the INC president. That was followed by a campaign to strengthen discipline and centralism in the Congress, which led to the left being dislodged, as planned, from the positions they had gained.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from: Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> M. N. Roy, *Men I Met*, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> See: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 288.

The upshot of the Tripuri session made Roy drop the idea that the formation of autonomous factions in the Congress tended to weaken the party's left wing. That had been the major point of tactical disagreement between Roy and Communists before. After Tripuri, Roy organised an independent League of Radical Congressmen (LRC) within the Congress Party with the declared object of combating the Gandhist ideology under the "Historic banner of Jacobinism".<sup>1</sup> That was the starting point of the departure of Roy and his supporters from Congress work.

Roy's alliance with Bose was of short duration. The Royists, just as Socialists and Communists, refused to enter the Forward Bloc Party, which was formed after Bose's resignation from INC presidency, but they agreed to cooperate with it. A Left Consolidation Committee was then set up only to fall apart by the end of 1939. Roy's group did not support the joint action by the left (the protest demonstration in Bombay against some decisions of the All-India Congress Committee).

At the INC session in Ramgarh in March 1940, Roy made his last, though futile, attempt at persuading the Congress to accept his idea of a constituent assembly. Rajendra Prasad declared that the resolution proposed by Roy presented an entirely different picture of independent India from what the Congressmen imagined it could be. At the same time, Roy was seeking his election as president of the Congress, but he was defeated by Moulana Abul Kalam Azad who polled ten times as many votes. At Ramgarh, the INC, being convinced of the futility of all efforts to induce the British Government to grant home rule to India in time of war, decided to resort to a traditional sanction—*satyagraha*. That was not the start of a campaign but that of an effort to prepare the people and to accept the necessity of civil resistance unless Britain yielded ground. Yet at the same time the INC leadership was taking steps to prevent the projected campaign of disobedience from going beyond the limits of Gandhist tactics. All members of the Congress were invited to swear full obedience to Gandhi and allegiance to the principle of non-violence. The Working Committee recommended to those who did not want to assume any

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

obligations of that kind to relinquish their administrative functions in the Congress. That went still further towards undermining the positions of Roy and all those who disagreed with Gandhi's leadership.

The Ramgarh session destroyed the illusions of Royists about the possibility of the Congress being transformed into a Jacobin party. The LRC conference in June 1940 placed it on record that the village INC organisations were in the hands of well-to-do peasants and that all attempts at rousing them to fight for the interests of the exploited masses were being suppressed by the "party bosses". The same conference reaffirmed the intention to oppose Gandhi's policies and to relinquish administrative posts in the INC or leave the party altogether, if necessary.<sup>1</sup>

It was the Royists' attitude to the war that served as the official excuse for their complete break with the INC. At the beginning of the Second World War, the LRC took up a neutral stand and called for the earliest possible ceasefire. But soon afterwards (before Hitler Germany's attack on the USSR) Roy came to the conclusion that Britain's war effort must be supported for the sake of the international struggle against fascism.

In the meantime, the Congress, while expressing its readiness to play its full part in the war against fascism on being granted independence, and convinced of the British Government's unwillingness to meet its demands, decided to launch the *satyagraha* in defence of the right to preach opposition to war. Roy, in a statement for the press, described that decision as a betrayal of democratic and progressive forces and called for cooperation with the British Government. As a result, he was relieved from all of his posts in the elected INC bodies. In October 1940 the LRC declared that Congress membership was incompatible with anti-fascist convictions and announced that a Radical Democratic Party of India was being set up outside the INC. Twelve years later Roy said that he had severed his relations with the Congress because of disagreement with its anti-war activities.<sup>2</sup> In actual fact, the reasons lay deeper. The LRC's withdrawal from the Congress was a logical

<sup>1</sup> John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 293.

<sup>2</sup> See: M. N. Roy—*Philosopher-Revolutionary*, p. 4.

sequel to the failure of the attempts of Roy and the Royists to impose their own platform on the Congress. That was the failure of Roy's political line, and the transformation of the LRC into a Radical Democratic Party of India signified no more than a delay in admitting that fact. That party had not become an appreciable factor in Indian political life, and in 1948, when Roy's bankruptcy had become perfectly obvious, it was disbanded.

#### TWO CONCEPTS OF UNITED FRONT TACTICS

When the Seventh Congress of the Comintern rejected the sectarian distortions of Lenin's strategy in the national and colonial question, Roy decided that his contradictions with the Comintern had been overcome and that the Comintern had accepted his standpoint. But he did not see the difference between his and Lenin's understanding of a united anti-imperialist front. His followers thought likewise. Bourgeois students of the Comintern's oriental policy are not inclined either to underline the difference between Roy's and the Comintern's methods of approach in the latter half of the 1930s. There are two objectives behind it. First, Roy is set off against the leftist trends of the period of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern as a true Indian Marxist perfectly conscious of the objective requirements of the communist movement in his country. Second, Roy's concept of united front and Roy's policy in general in the 1930s are attributed to the communist movement which is thereby accused of being insincere in the treatment of democratic and nationalist organisations and of an ambition to exploit united front tactics solely for its own interests so as to divide the alliance of anti-imperialist forces.

Yet Roy's platform in the 1930s just as well differed, in principle, from Lenin's strategy in the national and colonial question.

Lenin saw united front tactics as arising from the recognition of the objective necessity of an alliance of all anti-imperialist forces, including the patriotic elements of the national bourgeoisie, and objective background to, and historical progressive role of, the bourgeois-democratic and anti-imperialist movements in the colonial countries, with the working class and Communist parties absent or underdeveloped.



Roy, just as before, dismissed the revolutionary anti-imperialist potential of bourgeois nationalism. Even after the proclamation of the Republic in 1947 he still considered the advent of the Indian bourgeoisie to power as "very largely ... a gift of decayed imperialism" and described the conquest of independence as "an easy victory".<sup>1</sup> Consequently, he was still convinced of a collusion of national capital and the INC leadership with the British authorities.

Fascist methods were repugnant to Roy, Philip Spratt writes. Roy saw them as a confirmation of the "Marxist doctrine" about the reactionary nature of contemporary nationalism. Roy had always been suspicious even of Gandhist nationalism, Spratt goes on to say. The neutrality of the Congress in the holy war against Hitler followed, in Roy's opinion, from an "ideological sympathy between Gandhism and Nazism".<sup>2</sup> This is a clear case of a distortion of Marxism in the sense of vulgar interpretation peculiar to Roy. The idea about the reactionary nature of contemporary nationalism in general is an anti-Leninist argument which bourgeois writers have been trying to ascribe to Marxism so as to set it against the national liberation movement. Lenin had never spoken of the reactionary nature of nationalism in general. He viewed nationalism, just as any phenomenon for that matter, from a concrete historical angle and insisted on a clear line of distinction being drawn between the nationalism of the oppressor and oppressed nations, between reactionary nationalism expressing none but the interests of an exploitative minority, and democratic, anti-imperialist nationalism possessing considerable revolutionary potentialities for that form of nationalism embodied the primordial aspirations of the working masses for freedom and social justice. That was precisely the subject of the dispute between Lenin and Roy at the Second Congress of the Comintern, and that was what Roy failed to understand until his dying day as he saw any nationalism as being synonymous to reaction.

According to Lenin's theory, the policy of the united front of anti-imperialist forces at the stage of national liberation implied acceptance, in point of principle, of the

<sup>1</sup> M. N. Roy, *Men I Met*, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Spratt, *Op. cit.*, p. 38.

leadership by the bourgeois-democratic nationalist parties if Marxist forces did not have enough authority to fulfil that mission. Hence the idea of supporting the revolutionary trends of bourgeois nationalism and its leaders. Roy disagreed with that. His idea was one of an immediate hegemony of the proletarian party. His attitude to the INC leaders was vehemently and unequivocally negative.

Throughout his life Roy was unable to appreciate the actual merits of Gandhi's immense contribution to the Indian national liberation movement. Only after Gandhi was gone did Roy recognise his humanism, his lofty ideals of solidarity and justice, remaining, nevertheless, intolerant of Gandhist nationalism and religious teaching.<sup>1</sup> Just as during his dispute with Lenin, Roy invariably spoke about the "anti-revolutionary essence of Gandhism",<sup>2</sup> and one of the publishers of the Royist magazine *Radical Humanist*, Sibnarayan Ray, proudly stated that Roy "refused to make any compromise with the medieval obscurantism of the Mahatma, with the hypocrisy of his political disciples or with the prejudices of the people".<sup>3</sup> Gandhi "stood for everything the Communists opposed",<sup>4</sup> Overstreet and Windmiller write. But this statement misrepresents the substance of the matter and the position of Indian Communists. However, it is a little closer to the truth as far as Roy is concerned. In this case, too, Roy's views are attributed to the communist movement. As to the CPI, it has not always maintained a negative attitude to Gandhism which developed during the period when Roy was considered to be the leading Indian Marxist. To pursue the Leninist policy of a united anti-imperialist front demanded a substantial re-evaluation of Gandhism. That was how things were in 1939, when a prominent CPI leader, S. G. Sardesai, called for the positive potentialities of Gandhism, particularly those relating to the period of 1919-1920, to be used in the interest of the national movement. That was how things stood, too, in the second half of the 1950s, when books by Indian Communists about Gandhi and the "Sarvodaya and Communism" debate in the columns of the

<sup>1</sup> See: M. N. Roy, *Men I Met*, pp. 29-31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> M. N. Roy—*Philosopher-Revolutionary*, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 509.

*New Age* magazine served not only for a Marxist criticism of the social utopianism of Gandhism and his sustained compromise with the bourgeois INC leadership, but for an exposition of the non-bourgeois features of the ideology of Gandhism, Gandhi's conflict with bourgeois leaders in the twilight of his life, his commitment to the ideals of social justice, and certain revolutionary possibilities arising from Gandhist tactics of non-violent resistance. In consequence, cooperation with Gandhi's followers was accepted and even welcomed if they showed themselves willing to act with determination in defence of the interests of the working masses.<sup>1</sup> So, the CPI discarded the unobjective criticism of Gandhi and Gandhism which had been typical of Roy and his disciples.

Roy's attitude to Jawaharlal Nehru was a case of extreme sectarianism. It may be recalled that at the time of the Sixth Congress of the Comintern some leaders of the international communist movement regarded petty-bourgeois leaders as disguised and, therefore, most cunning and dangerous enemies of the communist and national liberation movement. Roy, although he disagreed with the general tenor of the decisions of the Sixth Congress, invariably guided himself by this erroneous principle, rejected by Communists shortly afterwards, in his assessment of Nehru. The emergence of Nehru in the 1930s as INC left-wing leader, his determination to rely on trade unions and peasant organisations and the enunciation of his allegiance to the principles of socialism in his speech at the INC Lucknow session were then welcomed by all revolutionary forces. An underground CPI magazine described that speech as "the clearest anti-imperialist appeal ever made from the Congress chair".<sup>2</sup>

Roy found otherwise. Since Nehru had not adopted the positions of scientific socialism, Roy refused to appreciate even the fact that he was more to the left than any of the generally recognised leaders of the Congress. Roy always thought in extreme terms: either a consistent revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary. Roy believed that all Nehru did was to disguise the positions of the right, enable them to carry on their political game and make the masses trust and

<sup>1</sup> See: E.M.S. Namboodiripad, *The Mahatma and the Ism*, New Delhi, 1959; Hiren Mukerjee, *Gandhiji. A Study*, National Book Agency (Private), Ltd., Calcutta, 1958; *New Age*, Vol. 7, Nos. 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, 1958.

<sup>2</sup> *The Communist*, Vol. 1, No. 12, 1936, p. 16.

follow them. That was the only view Roy had of Jawaharlal Nehru's political role. At the time of accentuated contradictions between the "old guard" of the INC and the young radicals of the 1930s, Nehru, in Roy's judgement, "confused" issues by associating nationalism with vaguely conceived socialist ideals. He was instrumental in arresting the process of differentiation between the forces of progress and conservatism by captivating the immaturity of the former with the lure of a socialist utopia. Conservative nationalism was rationalised as the means to social revolution. Nehru's socialist professions galvanised the antiquated cult just when it was losing its appeal to the progressive and democratic forces. Swayed by the silver-tongued oratory of the sea-green incorruptible people's tribune, they were fired with the fanaticism of reconverts and herded back to the fold of Gandhism, which had in the meantime shed the oddities which were incongruous in a struggle for mundane power.

"Nehru missed the chance to lead the movement for national liberation towards the higher goal of a social revolution of the kind which had brought Europe out of the twilight of the Middle Ages. Personal attachment to Gandhi precluded his moving in the direction of a genuine political greatness and creative leadership."<sup>1</sup>

Nehru's reluctance to accept the "Jacobinism of the 20th century", suggested by Roy, was enough for him to be identified with classic bourgeois nationalism and Congress bosses, representing the interests of the right-wing forces and Big Business. Roy argued that Nehru's "modernism serves the undemocratic and reactionary purpose of the Congress" and, therefore, his high place in the INC "has been conceded to him by the real bosses of the organisation".<sup>2</sup> Roy failed to appreciate the progressive measures taken by the Nehru Government and tended to explain them by demagogic considerations. For example, Roy attributed Nehru's historic rejection of US economic aid on terms implying an encroachment on the sovereignty of the new-born state to a vainglorious ambition to deserve the cheers of left forces on the world scene and those of the

<sup>1</sup> M. N. Roy, *Men I Met*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 246.

petty-bourgeois nationalist elements in India. Roy sympathetically quoted *The New York Times* as having found Nehru's action to be "one of the greatest disappointments of the post-war era".<sup>1</sup> However, it was Nehru's visit to the US, which Roy dismissed as an utter failure, that laid the groundwork for the policy of non-alignment.

Having labelled Nehru's socialist and democratic ideals as demagogic once and for all, Roy manifestly gave preference to political leaders outspokenly committed to more conservative, bourgeois-nationalist positions. His article about Sardar Patel was full of respect for "the man who would never be my ideal". That kind of respect was conspicuously absent in his numerous pronouncements about Nehru. Roy set Nehru off against even Chiang Kai-shek, holding the latter to be an honest nationalist who "did not want to play the Hamlet of China, like his more successful contemporary in India".<sup>2</sup>

The CPI's attitude to Jawaharlal Nehru had nothing in common with Roy's subjectivist criticism. Indian Communists, conscious as they were of Nehru's compromise position and inconsistency of his socialist views, do give its due to his immense contribution towards the Indian people's struggle for independence, towards the propagation of socialist ideals in India and other developing countries, and towards the elaboration and application of the principles of home and foreign policy to assure the advance of the Republic of India along the road of progress.

One of the favourite allegations of the bourgeois criticism of the united front policy applied by the Comintern and the CPI was that it aimed to capture the nationalist organisations and bring them under their own influence. This idea runs all through the book by two American authors on the history of the CPI. "Although Comintern policy for India was to take over the nationalist movement by capturing the Indian National Congress," Overstreet and Windmiller write, "Roy continued to oppose this policy [in the early 1920s—*Auth.*] and did his best to get the Comintern to abandon it."<sup>3</sup> Commenting on an article by British

Communists R. Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley "The Anti-Imperialist People's Front",<sup>1</sup> which referred to an intensification of left trends in the national liberation movement and the need for their influence to be further built up, Overstreet and Windmiller conclude: "The goal of capturing the Congress, and optimism as to its achievement, were therefore transparently proclaimed."<sup>2</sup> Having ascribed that line to the CPI and the Comintern, the American authors went on to speak about an intrinsic contradiction of the united front policy which was alleged to require the CPI to unite the nationalist movement along with attempting to capture it, while those two objectives cancelled each other out.<sup>3</sup>

However, neither the CPI nor the Comintern had ever aspired to "capture" the Congress, being perfectly aware of the solid positions of the national bourgeoisie within that organisation and realising how unrealistic such an undertaking would have been. It is Roy who had been trying since the late 1920s to capture the Congress when, discouraged by the difficulties facing him, he despaired of a possibility of creating a strong independent Communist party. So, it was Roy's line, not the one of the CPI and the Comintern. It logically followed from his principle that the hegemony of the proletariat in the national liberation movement was indispensable. Since the leadership by the working class and its party was proclaimed to be crucial to the success of the anti-imperialist struggle, a united front with the Congress or any other party for that matter could have any sense only if they yielded their leading positions to Roy's supporters. It was in the expectation of that turn of events that Roy launched his slogan of the united front which he interpreted as anything but the way Lenin and the Comintern saw it.

Overstreet and Windmiller produced a false dilemma alleged to have confronted the CPI. That was because of their undialectic perception of Lenin's united front idea as either the capture of nationalist organisations or total submission to them and the loss of one's own face. Lenin's

<sup>1</sup> M. N. Roy, *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 116.

<sup>3</sup> Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>1</sup> *International Press Correspondence*, Vol. 16, No. 11, 1936, pp. 297-300.

<sup>2</sup> Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

concept, on the contrary, implied combining an alliance with bourgeois parties with a struggle for influence upon them and, above all, upon the masses that followed them, and for a turn towards a genuinely consistent and uncompromising anti-imperialist course.

It is the one-sided understanding of the united front, arising, to some extent, from Roy's policy, that underlies the bourgeois criticism of the Indian Communists' attitude to the Congress Socialist Party in the 1930s. The CPI's position in this case, too, has quite often been identified with that of Roy, which was done first by Congress Socialists themselves when they accused Roy and the CPI of subversive activity following the withdrawal of the Royists from the Socialist Party. In a preface to an anti-communist publication of CPI documents, one of Roy's co-workers, V.B. Karnik, writes about the allegedly treacherous manner in which the Communists pursued their tactics of a united front.<sup>1</sup> Haithcox has also referred to the factionalism of the CPI and the Royists.<sup>2</sup>

However, the Indian Communists' attitude to the Congress Socialist Party was fundamentally different from the Royists' platform. The latter, as stated earlier on, had joined the Socialist Party in the hope of bringing it under their own influence. In that sense they held the same position as they did in respect of the INC. Having found that aim unattainable, the Royists withdrew from the party. They saw a united front involving differences of principle inside it as unacceptable to them. Indian Communists, whose own party was banned, never pledged themselves, when joining the Congress Socialist Party individually, to renounce the idea of an independent organisation and political line or that of committed criticism of the inconsistency and vacillations of the heterogeneous leadership of the Congress Socialists. They remained Communists, never acting as Jacobins. They joined the Socialist Party because they saw some real ground for joint action with it, just as the Socialists themselves, in their turn, were members of the INC, without ever considering this to be an obstacle to their criticism of its leadership's political course. The Socialists

<sup>1</sup> See: *Indian Communist Party Documents 1930-1956*, p. V.

<sup>2</sup> See: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 233.

were intolerant of the independent position of the Communists and saw all their criticisms of the party leadership, as well as their desire to build up and rally their ranks and to win the working masses over to the party line, as factionalism. In June 1937 the Communists had to protest against a "heresy hunt" in the CSP and opposed the attempts at berating any party member critical of its executive as a "disruptor".<sup>1</sup> Disturbed by the growing influence of the Communists, the Socialists stopped admitting them to the party. The right-wing socialist leader M. R. Masani demanded the total expulsion of the Communists and succeeded in imposing his view on the entire party in 1940. The rupture of the alliance of the two left parties was, therefore, a result of the Socialists' unwillingness to put up with the independence and the rising influence of the Communists. Indeed, many rank-and-file members of the Socialist Party, which called itself Marxist, defected to the Communists because they saw them as the most steadfast and consistent champions of the working people's cause and as true partisans of scientific socialism.

It was stated earlier on that Roy's perception of the united front idea was different from Lenin's and from the guiding principles of the CPI, for it implied denying the necessity for an independent proletarian vanguard and for its mass base to be formed by the class organisations of workers and peasants never absorbed by the national bourgeois parties. There have been some attempts in bourgeois literature, nevertheless, to justify Roy's nihilistic attitude to an independent peasant movement by allusions to Lenin. This has been coupled with the traditional argument about Marxism's contempt for the peasantry<sup>2</sup> and about its rejection of independent political activity.

Roy wrote: "It should not be difficult for a Marxist to grasp that nothing could be a greater obstacle to Socialism than a peasantry organised in their independent class organisation."<sup>3</sup> Haithcox attributes these views to Lenin. In his opinion, "Roy also shared Lenin's aversion to separate organisations of non-proletarian classes", "Roy also shared

<sup>1</sup> Gene D. Overstreet, Marshall Windmiller, *Op. cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> See: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 253.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from: *Ibid.*, p. 264.

Lenin's view that separate peasant organisations were not only unnecessary, but undesirable".<sup>1</sup> In so doing, Haithcox not only misrepresents Lenin's attitude to the peasant movement in general, but passes over the distinction between socialist and bourgeois-democratic revolution, between the conditions of Russia and those of the East, making the same mistake as Roy did. Lenin always attached paramount importance to the position of the peasantry in a revolutionary movement and its organisation, never losing sight of the fact that the class base of that organisation changed depending on the particular stage of the revolution. The outstanding role of the peasantry in Eastern societies, where it is the bulk of the population, was obvious to him. "We must realise," Lenin said, "that the transition to communism cannot be accomplished by the vanguard alone. The task is to arouse the working masses to revolutionary activity, to independent action and to organisation, regardless of the level they have reached."<sup>2</sup> It is a matter of record that, unlike Roy, the CPI strongly supported the independent peasant movement and made a big contribution towards organising peasant unions and guiding them in a revolutionary way.

#### M. N. ROY'S IDEOLOGICAL REGENERATION

The closing years of Roy's life were not only those of bitter disappointment in his political activity, but those of a total revision of his outlook. Having renounced political activity in 1948, Roy founded the Indian Renaissance Institute, a cultural and educational institution through which to preach his new philosophical "ideas of radical (or integral) humanism, or new humanism".

Roy's supporters, seeing him diverge step by step from Marxism, and still more from what they called the "Marxism of the Bolshevik school", maintained nevertheless that Roy's ideas remained "in broad outline Marxist".<sup>3</sup> Some

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 264, 263.

<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, "Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East, November 22, 1919", *Collected Works*, Vol. 30, p. 162.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Spratt, *Op. cit.*, p. 41.

have even suggested that Roy enriched Marxist concepts with the latest research findings.

In actual fact, Roy's ideological evolution of the late 1940s and the early 1950s was a total renunciation of Marxism and of his own views of the preceding period. All that remained of the Roy of old was his intolerance of religion and nationalism as well as his advocacy of modernism in every area of life as a counterbalance to the traditional life-style.

The new Roy came down upon historical materialism, announcing that "Marxist economic determinism is no less antithetical to the idea of social revolution than the religious theological view of nature, life and society".<sup>1</sup> He substituted his own speculation on the nature of man for the Marxist concept of classes and the class struggle as the real substance of social development eventually determined by the level of productive forces. "The origin of the laws of social evolution must be traced in anthropology, in the nature of man," Roy wrote. "Human history, like natural history, is a determined process. But it is self-determined; and it is not absolute determinism.... The dynamics of ideas and the dialectics of social development are parallel processes, both stimulated by man's biological urge for freedom. They naturally influence each other.... Man's struggle for freedom is a continuation of the biological struggle for survival, on a higher level..."<sup>2</sup>

Roy substituted a biological and anthropological analysis for a social one. His concept, hostile to religion and retaining some vestiges of the earlier materialistic philosophies (to underline the distinction from Marxist materialism, Roy employed the term "physical-realism"), has its roots reaching back into the 18th century. "At the close of the Middle Ages in Europe ... man revolted against the tutelage of God and started moving towards the realisation that he could be self-sufficient and self-reliant," Roy wrote. "The classical revolt of man, reinforced by the expanding scientific knowledge, reached the highwater mark in the eighteenth century, when a great advance was made in the age-long

<sup>1</sup> M. N. Roy, *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*, Vol. 2, Renaissance Publishers (Private), Ltd., Calcutta, 1955, p. 285.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 286, 287, 288.

effort to formulate a humanist social philosophy, including a secular ethics, on the basis of a materialist metaphysics.... The tradition of the eighteenth-century naturalist Humanism and of its development in the nineteenth century alone can inspire a philosophy which will set man free, spiritually as well as socially."<sup>1</sup> So, Roy reverted from Marxist materialism to pre-Marxian naturalism. His appeal for the "regeneration of man" should be understood not only as the aim of social development, but also as an attempt at replacing the science of classes and society by speculation on the abstract, biological man in the spirit of materialist philosophers of the 18th century.

The social aims which Roy set himself towards the end of his life went through no less change than his philosophy. Roy renounced the ideals of socialism and communism. "The popular remedies offered by the leftist parties will not serve the purpose," he reasoned. "When a country has still to build industries, their nationalisation is evidently a premature proposition. Socialism was conceived as a way out of the crisis of capitalism in advanced societies with a high degree of industrialisation and a mature working class. That is a very different matter from building up new industries in backward countries where the workers are still half peasants. Socialism today would mean a more or less equal distribution of poverty. Therefore, the main plank in the economic programme of the leftist parties has very little in common with the scientific Socialism evolved by Karl Marx under entirely different circumstances." Having pointed out that a reorganisation of the Indian economy should be started in its main sector—agriculture—Roy re-emphasises that the agricultural reform that India needs has nothing in common with socialism. He speaks of a sound and rational modern economy and poses the problem of increasing soil fertility and meeting the peasants' demand for housing, clothing and food and also refers to the need to build roads, set up consumer cooperatives, etc.,<sup>2</sup> reducing all reform to technical and agronomical change, while passing over without any mention at all the resolution of class

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 298-99.

<sup>2</sup> M. N. Roy, *Politics, Power and Parties*, Renaissance Publishers (Private), Ltd., Calcutta, 1960, p. 160.

contradictions in the countryside and the social, not technical, resources for the advance of the national economy, consisting in the abolition of exploitation, inequality and parasitism.

To socialism and communism Roy opposed the vague goals of "progress and prosperity". According to Roy, "New Humanism advocates a social reconstruction of the world as a commonwealth and fraternity of free men, by the cooperative endeavour of spiritually emancipated moral men". Roy emphasised the cosmopolitan character of "New Humanism". The commonwealth of spiritually free men "will not be limited by the boundaries of national States—capitalist, fascist, socialist, communist, or of any other kind—which will gradually disappear under the impact of the twentieth-century Renaissance of Man".<sup>1</sup>

Roy rejected the communist ideal. He called the Communist parties' goals and political line "communist adventurism",<sup>2</sup> the term which, with the prefix "pseudo" added to it, would identify his own past. His repudiation of communism was coupled with his loss of "faith in the liberating significance of the Russian revolution".<sup>3</sup>

The revulsion of nationalism, cosmopolitan ideas, as well as, perhaps, the old theory of "decolonisation", brought Roy to a manifest ignorance of imperialist exploitation and a failure to understand its new, neo-colonialist methods. "The leftists," said Roy, "who are merely acting as the extremist wing of nationalism, maintain that even today Imperialism is still pooling wires and oppressing India."<sup>4</sup> So, Roy ceased to understand the general democratic tasks before India. Hence his criticism of Nehru's position with regard to American aid and his denunciation of nationalism.

It is worth noting the evolution of Roy's political views in the restricted sense of the term. There was not a trace left of the ideas of a Jacobin constituent assembly or of action to bring it about. The radical dictatorship with proletarian revolutionaries to play the leading role was supplanted by anarchist concepts designed to uphold the

<sup>1</sup> M. N. Roy, *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> M. N. Roy, *Politics, Power and Parties*, p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> See: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 298.

<sup>4</sup> M. N. Roy, *Op. cit.*, p. 206.

freedom of an abstract, non-class individual. "Ever since the days of Plato, the fundamental problem of politics has been the relation between the State and the individual," Roy wrote, proposing that the problem should be solved in keeping with anarchist traditions. "The basic idea of a new, revolutionary social philosophy, therefore, must be that the individual is prior to society, and individual freedom must have priority over social organisation."<sup>1</sup>

It is a political system based on decentralisation that was supposed to achieve that objective. In it, the state is to be built on the foundation of "local republics", whose principal functions should be to train the citizens to develop a sense of their sovereign rights and to create the conditions for such rights to be reasonably exercised. Local republics appeared to be something like a network of political schools, but the right of recall of deputies and referenda will give them the power of direct and effective control over the entire machinery of the state. "Such a democracy," Roy writes, "will transcend the limits of party politics. Individual men will have the chance of being recognised on their merits. Party loyalty and party patronage will no longer eclipse intellectual independence, moral integrity and detached wisdom."<sup>2</sup>

The task is, therefore, to remove the parties which Roy found intent on abrogating the power belonging to the people and to be disintegrating on contact with it. Roy's supporters were not seeking political power. Their only mission was to convince the people that they must hold all power in their hands, guided by their personal convictions, without delegating power to political parties.

To educate the citizens in the spirit of genuine democracy was declared to be the only means of influencing the course of social development. "That sounds like Fabian gradualism," Roy admitted, but the supporters of "New Humanism" had nothing else left for them, in Roy's own judgement.<sup>3</sup>

Roy's political ideals in the closing years of his life tilted towards undisguised anarchism, comprising an exaggeration

<sup>1</sup> M. N. Roy, *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*, pp. 282, 284.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280.

<sup>3</sup> M. N. Roy, *Politics, Power and Parties*, p. 83.

of individual freedom and the treatment of the relations between the individual and the state as a major problem of politics, and excessive decentralisation, as well as political apathy which showed itself in an ambition to write off all political parties. One could not have vindicated all those views without crossing out the theory of the class struggle and the political struggle of the parties it is bound to engender. Roy's anarchism, among other things, had nothing revolutionary or radical about it. That was an inoffensive anarchism of an enlightenment kind, capable of doing nothing except misguiding the masses and in no way threatening the privileged classes and the state.

Astonishing though it may seem, towards the end of his life Roy had come round to sharing the views which were amazingly close (except as regards the attitude to religion, modernism and nationalism) to the ideals of the man he had fought against unsuccessfully for years—Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Roy's local republics, repudiating the parties, substituting enlightenment and serving the people as much as possible for political action, were nothing short of Gandhi's non-violent anarchism. That is why Jay Prakash Narayan, who had adopted the Gandhian position of "partyless democracy" by the early 1950s, noted a similarity between his views on the matter and Roy's concepts.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to underscore Roy's ideological evolution of the late 1940s and the early 1950s because bourgeois authors are inclined to pass him off for a critic of the Comintern from what they describe as the positions of a truly revolutionary and creative Marxism nurtured on Indian soil.

The whole of Roy's social activity was marked by instability and waverings from one extreme to another. That was true of his abrupt turn from combating the INC to working within the INC framework, from his advocacy of a mass revolutionary party outside the Congress to his preaching of the idea that the CPI was unnecessary and, finally, from his active political struggle to his sermon of "New Humanism".

Much of what Roy attributed to his contemporaries was typical of his own personality. He would describe Jawaharlal Nehru's gravitation towards socialism and Marxism as a

<sup>1</sup> See: John Patrick Haithcox, *Op. cit.*, p. 332.

“typical groping of the lonesome individual of the 20th century ... for a vaguely conceived new world”.<sup>1</sup> The upshot of Roy’s ideological evolution shows that this assessment can well be applied to himself. Roy had arrived at Marxism not as a proletarian revolutionary having grasped the underlying fundamental principles of the historical process, but as a subjective-minded national revolutionary seeking the means for a radical transformation of the world. He had looked forward to Marxism establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat in India immediately and, once he saw that to be unattainable forthwith, he threw Marxism by the wayside.

Roy spoke ironically from time to time about people who would strive to play the role of great personalities destined to perform a historic mission without considering that the possibilities for social reorganisation were not within themselves but in the objective conditions. But that was one of Roy’s own basic defects. All of his political activity was stamped with revolutionary impatience, adventurism, wishful thinking, inability to make a scientific analysis of objective realities, a failure to understand the exceptional complexity as well as the manifold and sustained character of the struggle for socialism in colonial countries. It is these qualities that brought Roy to political bankruptcy.

The balance of his life was controversial. At the beginning of his activity, Roy played a great role in propagating the ideas of Marxism-Leninism in India and in bringing young Indian revolutionaries into the communist movement. He could do so in virtue of his personal revolutionary commitment, energy, power of conviction and prestige he had among radical nationalists. But there was a process of ideological and political dissociation that went on without interruption in the communist movement of all countries, particularly in the colonial countries. The transition from radical-nationalist and petty-bourgeois positions to consistently socialist ones was very complicated, and not everybody succeeded in bringing it off. Roy turned out to be one of those who had failed to travel that road to the end and broke with the communist movement, having given

preference to the “New Humanism” which he preached as a special and revolutionary system. His ideological and political crisis stood in sharp contrast to the history of the CPI which, having survived the years of hard struggle, setbacks, errors, and occasional defeats, has retained its loyalty to Marxism-Leninism and the interests of the Indian working people. It is the activities of Roy in rejecting the Leninist line of the Comintern that had brought him up a blind alley.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.